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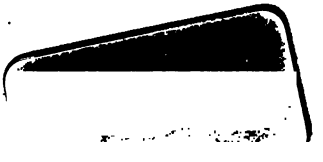

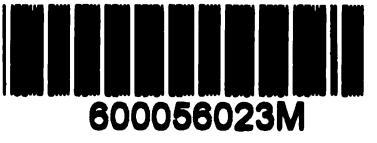
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THE

MOORS AND THE FENS.

BY

F. G. TRAFFORD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MOORS AND THE FENS.

CHAPTER I.

A HAPPY HOME.

Amongst the fens of Lincolnshire—in the dreariest portion of that miserable county, where all is barren and, if not unprofitable, at least uninteresting—stood, at the period this history commences, an old-fashioned, dingy-looking mansion, tenanted by Sir Ernest Ivraine, the miser-descendant of a long line of contemptible ancestors.

The house, situated near the centre of a large quagmiry park, commanded a mournful view over marshy lands, stagnant pools, and a river, so sluggish in its course that all kinds of water-plants grew and flourished on the surface; connecting it, in reality as in appearance, with the low flat fields bordering it—for they were terrestrial swamps, while it was an aquatic one.

How far the roots of the poplar and willow trees, standing like spectral sentinels at regular intervals along the margin of the "stream"—as the natives, with a species of satire, none the less melancholy because unconscious, called it — had to penetrate before reaching a solid foundation, was a mystery nobody ever cared to fathom; for the damp stagnated the curiosity as well as the blood of the inhabitants: and whilst the guardians of the sorrowful river throve upon its banks, it was deemed, and justly, a matter of secondary importance how they managed to effect it.

Of all trees in the world poplars are, surely, the least beautiful; particularly when, as is the most approved mode in Lincolnshire, they are clipped and pruned, and stuck like sinful spirits along the edges of stagnant rivers, to make the desolate landscape look—if that were possible—doubly desolate and forlorn.

What an unspeakably wretched place that "Paradise" was where Sir Ernest Ivraine lived and sinned: or rather, starved and sinned! Who could have dreamed that, in times long past, it was so christened, not by a grim old cynic, but by a fair young bride; who soon, pining away broken-hearted, sickened, died, and sought a brighter and a happier

home? What mortal man, seeing the baronet's abode on a December's day, would have credited, had verbal testimony not been corroborated by additional evidence, that any human being could choose to inhabit such a spot, if it were possible for him, by dint of labour or stratagem, to escape from it?

In the glorious summer days, indeed, when most of the fields were covered with waving corn, and the swamps donned a brownish-greenish mantle, and draining was spoken of by theoretical persons as possible; when water-lilies bloomed on the bosom of the slimy river, and everything looked its very best; it became just palpable to the vivid imaginations of a few, that, with an immense expenditure of money, something might be made of the place: and people suggested that, when the old baronet died, great improvements might be anticipated; for, of course, Sir Ernest the younger, when he came to his estate and title, would render the home of his boyhood worthy of its name and his ancestors. In plain words, Lincolnshire sages expected he would waste a fortune in endeavouring to beautify that which nature and climate decreed should never be beautiful, or habitable for more than three brief months out of the twelve universally admitted to "make one year."

Very little doubt ever remains on the minds of unprejudiced individuals, after visiting the favoured county referred to, that when Dr. Syntax set out on his memorable journey in search of the picturesque, it was through Lincolnshire he wandered; and, in support of the above proposition, it may briefly be stated, that the only pretty or cheering object visible from the windows of Paradise was the grey primitive church spire of Lorton; which always, solemnly though silently, reminded him whose eye fell upon it, that sooner or later he would have finished gazing wearily over the swampy earth, and be lying, with closed lids and quiet heart, under it.

It might have been imagined that years spent in a place like this, must have reduced any human being to a state of utter hopelessness: have paled his cheek, crushed his spirit, emaciated his body, and enfeebled his mind; but such was not the case with a single inhabitant of that dreary pile, whose interior indeed more resembled Tartarus than what the poor gentle lady had fancied it would prove to her—Paradise.

But some people, like some plants, seem able to flourish anywhere; and the minds of a few, instead of stagnating by reason of dwelling among swamps, either prey incessantly on themselves or else become restlessly active in striking out, on the anvils of their

imaginations, burning plans, presenting a remote chance of escape from the bonds wherewith destiny has bound them.

The first effect had apparently been produced, by place and circumstances, upon Ernest Ivraine, the elder son of the baronet, heir apparent to the old man's title, and to the swamps and waters and poplars of Paradise,—heir presumptive to the gold, and bonds, and mortgages, and title-deeds which his father kept under lock and key so rigidly, that relative nor stranger never knew what might be the precise amount of the wealth in the midst of which he denied himself and his sons everything, save the poorest and barest necessaries of existence. It appeared, indeed, as if the stern and gloomy young man had at length come to the conclusion that it was desirable for him to relinquish altogether a habit wherein, even at his best, he could scarcely have been deemed proficient — that of thinking aloud. He very rarely spoke: two or three persons, besides his brother, had, it is true, a vague recollection of having, at some remote period, heard Ernest Ivraine talk; but the recollection was so very vague, that they frequently felt inclined to believe it a delusion.

He seemed to have finally retired into himself, in the conviction that life, under such circumstances,

was a curse, and grumbling would not mend the matter. If he could have grown callous and insensible, it would have been better for him; but not having been endowed by nature with the invaluable faculty of converting himself *à plaisir* into a vegetable, he decided on taking refuge in silence.

Personally he was what that portion of Her Majesty's subjects disrespectfully termed "bog-trotters," so expressively style "a dark solitary looking man," who might readily enough have passed for thirty, ere twenty-three years had set their stamp upon his brow. His hair was black, long, and innocent of the remotest intention of curling; his whiskers were also of the same raven shade, and as he considered it a useless labour to make more than a very moderate use of the razor, the lower portion of his face looked blue; thus affording a strange contrast to the remainder of his countenance, which was of a clear olive. Large melancholy eyes, seeming to be perpetually gazing forth, bitterly and sorrowfully, over the world in which he had been so unhappily placed; a straight nose; a mouth, which, when he did open it, displayed teeth white and regular; these were the main features of a face, whose characteristic expression was that of proud, quiet, despairing grief. It would have been impos-

sible to determine from it, whether he were possessed of talent, of the capability to love, of the desire to struggle; whether he cared for anything or nothing; if his temper were good or bad; if his principles were noble or the reverse; what his rules of action might be, or whether he had any. Only three things could positively be ascertained from his countenance, namely, that he thought about something, and felt a vast deal; and that what he thought about, and upon what subject he felt so deeply, mortal man would never learn from those firmly-compressed lips, which he only opened when dire necessity compelled the disagreeable task.

He lived in himself; whether for himself alone was a mystery, which, like the roots of the poplar trees, no one cared to solve: perhaps his thoughts remained in the swamps; perhaps they went further, and struck deep in better soil beyond; some few suggested they stayed in his father's coffers: at all events, nobody knew where they dwelt, or what they were.

Two years and six brief months of disparity in their ages did not solely make the vast difference betwixt him and his only brother, Henry. We must bear in mind the dissimilarity of their characters—wide as the poles asunder: the elder endured, the younger chafed; the former thought, the latter

acted; Ernest was prudent, Henry rash; the one was stern and melancholy by nature, the other had been rendered indignant and desperate by circumstances. Ernest seemed older than he actually was, his brother younger; the hair of the latter was light, his step rapid, his manner frank, his complexion fair, his character energetic, his temper amiable, though hasty. He was disposed to look on the bright side of things; and assuredly it was not his fault that there was nothing bright or happy about Paradise, excepting the birds singing in the neglected gardens, and the water-lilies when they were in bloom: nothing bright nor happy,—no one to talk to, to love, to cling to, to confide in, to sympathise with, save Ernest, his silent brother. But, notwithstanding his silence and his melancholy, and the dissimilarity of their natures, it was quite touching to note the affection these two young men entertained for one another; to hear how for hours the younger would talk and the elder listen; to see how completely Henry seemed to understand Ernest, not by the power of knowledge, but by the force of faith and confiding love.

The unwavering, sterling attachment the miser's sons felt and retained in their hearts, from infancy to age, was for many and many a year the only moral

flower which bloomed and flourished in the withering, pestilential atmosphere of Paradise.

"Ernest," said the younger, as they sat together one gloomy November's evening over the smouldering embers of a wood fire, "Ernest."

The person so addressed removed his steadfast gaze from the ashes on the hearth, and fixing it, as was his wont, earnestly on his brother, briefly answered, "Well!"

"I want you to attend to me for five minutes."

"I am attending, pray go on," said Ernest.

"I wish to tell you I have finally made up my mind that this state of things can be endured no longer: what say you?"

"Nothing," was the rejoinder.

"Yes, but I want you to say something: you do not think we ought to bear it?"

"I do not see how we can avoid it."

"We are not *forced* to bear it," remarked the younger.

"How do you make that out?" demanded Ernest.

"I will explain," Henry continued; "but first let me throw a little light on your face before proceeding to throw some light on my subject. Now you need not say no, nor look so grave, for I am not going to be frozen for any man living, even though

he be my father; there are as many branches and twigs and sticks about the park as would keep us years. I expect one of these days to be ordered out to gather them: I saw my father picking some up the other morning: but, at all events, while the fuel lasts, we will have a rousing fire for once: so here goes."

As he spoke, he flung two or three short logs of wood on the embers, and laughed bitterly to see how speedily they ignited, and how the flames went crackling and blazing up the chimney.

"Now I can go on," he said, looking fixedly at Ernest, whose face seemed to grow graver and sterner by the changing light. "I say we are not *forced* to bear it, and you want to know how I make that out; and I explain that, as nobody asks us to stay here, and no duty requires that we should do so—as no one wants us to remain, as we are incumbrances rather than blessings, sources of irritation instead of joy, or satisfaction, or comfort—we are at perfect liberty to go."

"Where?" demanded Ernest.

"Where!" repeated his brother, "anywhere, away from here—out into the world, to some place where we can make money, or save it, or spend it, or give it, as we like."

"How?" was the brief question.

"Now you come to what has puzzled and kept me lounging here for so long a time. I thought of that, you know, Ernest, till I got first angry, and then sick, and at last furious. We are not well educated: that is, though we have done a little for ourselves, and read and thought, still we are *not* well educated. We could not enter any profession even if we were, for law and physic and theology, all require money: soul and body and mind—there is no use attempting to cure any of them unless you are prepared to pay a preliminary fee, in some shape or another, for the privilege. Besides, I do not like lawyers, and I have a horror of doctors, and I am sure when I find it so difficult to listen to a sermon, I should never be able to write one; and a man must have means to live on till he gets into practice or orders: in brief, black is not the colour for me; I saw that plainly enough long ago."

"You have told me all this before," remarked Ernest, in a tone of disappointment, as his brother paused, "fifty times."

"Well, I know that," said Henry, laughing; "but I want to impress upon you that we are unfitted by nature and education to make money in the pulpit, the sick room, or at the bar."

"You do not speak reverentially of the Church, Henry; you jumble everything together,—add all up in columns of pounds, shillings, and pence, and——"

"Find the sum total *nil*," interposed the younger. "You may preach if you like, but you know as well as I do that if you thought you could make money by becoming a parson, you would don a surplice to-morrow, even though you had no vocation, as people call it. Now would you not?"

"I have sometimes thought if a good situation as hangman were offered to me I would accept it," Ernest confessed; "but it was only a thought: so now, having settled what you are *not* fit for, pray proceed."

"No, I have only settled some of the callings for which I am unfitted; there are plenty more."

"Spare me their recital," said Ernest; "I know them off by heart."

"To sum up all," began Henry, "we have not the means to be landed gentlemen, or gentlemen who frequent clubs, or even small gentry; we cannot become professionals of any kind, or men of business, or farmers, or artizans, or shopkeepers: it is a living death to stay here, a wasting of existence and strength and youth; so, as I said, or

at least implied, before, I have finally resolved to go."

"And, for the second time, I ask you where?"

"And I answer, in all sincerity, I do not know. My present plan is this—I wish that you also could be induced to adopt it—to start off, say to-morrow or the next day, for London, see if there be any single thing I am fit for there, and if not—if no other opening present itself—enter the army."

"You have no money to purchase a commission; how will you obtain it? to whom do you mean to apply?"

"Friends and connections, you know we have, Ernest, possessed of sufficient influence to obtain more than that for both of us, if they would; but they are not the men to encourage the son in rebellion against his parent; to offend the powers that be; to lose, by a single false step, their chance, however remote, of a portion of the old man's gold. No, I mean to apply to none of them: I despise my relations. I will gain a name by my own unassisted efforts: no man shall say 'No' to me, or keep me hanging on for months, waiting for a civil or uncivil answer to my request. It disgusts me to hear people speculating on the chances of my father's demise, expatiating on the folly of offending him, on the

probabilities of whether you or I shall be left the best off. I don't pretend to entertain any great amount of affection for my father, but I cannot bear to think of his death as a matter of importance and rejoicing to myself: I had rather win a fortune than wait for one: I cannot stay here to play the part of a hypocrite, in order that, at some remote period, wealth, which in the interim I might make for myself, may *perhaps* be bequeathed to me. I do not desire to bring the sin on my soul of wishing for any man's death—how much more that of a parent! and I dread that if I remain here much longer, I should look forward with impatience to even that event as to my only chance of freedom from bondage and misery."

There was a long pause, during which Ernest Ivraine gazed moodily into the fire; but at length, turning abruptly towards his brother, he said,

"You have hitherto merely told me what you are neither competent, nor intending, to do: now what is your plan? always supposing you have one."

"I will beg favours, I have said, from no man," returned Henry, who apparently was incapable of giving a short direct answer to any question; "bitter and scanty enough, Heaven knows, has seemed the bread of dependence I have eaten under my father's

roof: how, therefore, should I relish that doled out to me by the hands of strangers? If I win a name, parent and friends shall hear of me again; if not, I shall never revisit the land of my birth. I will either make a happy home for myself *on* the earth, or else seek a quiet one *in* it; but I will make that home for myself by my own exertions. I am young, healthy, and active; why should I not rise to fame and fortune yet? I am resolved, however, not to gain them by patronage—that fickle thing which lifts a man up one moment far above his true position, and flings him, the next, down many degrees below it: I will be the sole architect of my own fortunes; no one shall ever say of me, 'I made him what he is:' I will do it all myself, Ernest. What do you think?"

"That the project sounds wonderfully well; but I am still in ignorance of how you expect to accomplish it," replied the elder brother.

"If nothing better turn up, by entering the army," was the response.

"But as you have neither money nor influence, how can you enter it?" demanded Ernest.

"Simply enough: I inquire for a regiment bound for India or any other fighting place, seek an interview with a recruiting serjeant, explain to him that

I want to go where hard knocks are more plentiful than fine words, remark that I am six feet high, fear death in no shape, dread no man living, desire to serve my country and myself, finally receive from him one shilling of the current coin of the realm—and the deed is done. I am the son of Sir Ernest Ivraine no longer; fling overboard all useless gentility, all absurd expectations; and start, before I am quite one-and-twenty, as plain Henry Ivraine, private in His Majesty's — regiment of foot."

"Bound to serve His Majesty for years as a private, with no friend to buy you off, no one to help you up."

"Except God and myself," rejoined the youth.

There was a long pause.

"And so, Henry, this is your last plan," said his brother, at length, with a melancholy and rather sweet smile.

"And final one," replied the other. "Will you adopt it too, Ernest? let us be brothers in arms as well as brothers in reality: we will enjoy life together, we will dare death side by side, and when you come to your title, who will ask what Sir Ernest Ivraine and his rash brother Henry did when they were youths? We could fight our way up the

rugged steep to fortune if we were but united in soul. If you were wounded I would nurse you tenderly, as our mother might have done had she been living now, Ernest: if I died, you would look me out a quiet grave in that distant land: and if it pleased God to bless our efforts, we might return triumphantly together to our native country, and show our friends how wisely we had acted, and let the old man leave his money to whom he listed. We might make happy homes for ourselves in some place; in the name of sense and manliness and independence, let us be up and doing."

The impetuous young man had risen from his seat in the middle of his hurried appeal, and he now laid a hand on his brother's shoulder, as if he would have dragged him away from that house to a more brilliant destiny; but Ernest, sadly disengaging himself, said:

"Sit down, Henry; endeavour to be calm and rational, and look at this matter from a reasonable point of view. Do not permit imagination to run away with judgment; contemplate the probable consequences of the step you are now dreaming of. You offend our father's pride, which is second only to his avarice; you destroy your only chance of independence by thus irritating him; you em-

brace a life of hardship and misery; war is a trade at which you can never make money; you will be thrown with low companions. *This* is bad I admit, but *that* would be worse. You are free to leave your father's roof at any hour, upon any pretence; you cannot quit the King's service, were your heart breaking, without the certainty of punishment and disgrace ensuing. You are wretched here; you would be still more wretched there. Wait still a little longer, till we see if nothing arise likely to better our position in any way. Will you wait?"

"No," said Henry, "I will not; no life, not that of a galley-slave, could be worse than this. I tell you, Ernest, I will make a name, a home, a fortune for myself; and, oh! how much better I could struggle if you would come with me, were you but by my side."

His brother only shook his head in reply.

"Do not say no, Ernest," resumed the other; "let us go forth together fearlessly and hopefully; let us shake the shackles of this accursed gold from us, and see whether there be not in life something more precious than money—liberty. How happy we should be, exploring foreign climes together! We could seek our fortunes in some other way, if you like not the idea of the army: the estate *must*

come to you, whether at home or absent; our father may leave his *gold* to his most distant relative. Why, in plain words, brother, should we waste the best portion of our lives here, waiting for his death —the death of him my mother loved, whose children we are, who is the nearest, and should be the dearest, living connection we have? I feel the guilt of the idea, Ernest, oppress me; let us flee from the great temptation—in God's name, let us be gone!"

The elder turned deadly pale as his brother spoke, but gave no answer.

"It cannot be that *you* thirst for gold," continued Henry, "that the epidemic of our race has smitten you also. No, no; I do not, could never believe that: surely you love liberty. I know you do not mind privation or hardship, or dread death: neither of us is a coward, Ernest. Oh! bravely we could fight our way to rank and wealth; only say you will come, brother—only say you will come."

"To be for years a common soldier, and then a pauper baronet?" Ernest added bitterly. "You are not aware what you are throwing away, Henry; you do not know what you are talking about."

"I know I am talking of throwing away a weight from my heart, a sin from my conscience," returned the younger, hastily; "think of it, think of this

wretched life and that dreadful guilt, of what it may all end in; that, after waiting, watching, and enduring, when we are middle-aged men he can leave us utterly penniless. The estate must be yours, as I said before: staying or going, we are *sure* of nothing else. I hear my father coming now. Ponder upon it, Ernest, well."

CHAPTER II.

THE WILFULNESS OF YOUTH.

Henry Ivraine had scarcely concluded, when the door of the apartment was flung violently open, giving admittance to the tall gaunt baronet, the "Miser Sir Ernest," as he was universally called by all who knew him.

He resembled, and yet was dissimilar to, both his sons, having the rapid, energetic manner of the one, and the melancholy, dissatisfied expression of the other; his hair, which had once been black as Ernest's, was now grey and grizzled; his face was wrinkled, though apparently more from temper than great age; his eyes were dark and keen, and seemed to be perpetually darting rapid glances into remote corners in search of any coin, no matter how insignificant; his mouth, like the clasp of a purse, appeared to have a natural disinclination to open, excepting with a snap; his untrimmed beard gave

a wild, haggard expression to his wasted features; his hands were long and thin, the fingers bent like vulture's claws. He had on an old pair of slippers, coarse stockings, grey trousers of the commonest material, an old tattered faded dressing gown, which, floating behind as he shuffled rapidly towards the fire-place, gave him the appearance of a theatrical caricature, save that the stage always lacks that of which he had the stamp—reality.

"At it again, Henry," he commenced, hastily removing the blazing logs from their position and extinguishing them, as if they had been going to set the house on fire, "at it again, haranguing and talking and wasting the fuel; you will die in the workhouse yet, boy; you would spend a fortune in a week. If you never can keep silent for ten minutes at a time, why can't you talk in the dark? you do not require to see when you are speaking, do you? I cannot afford such fires; and that reminds me—what's this bill which has just come in?"

"You have not left me light sufficient to inform you," answered the youth angrily, gazing for a moment at his parent through the gloom, with a look in which contempt had decidedly gained the mastery over filial respect; but then, remembering

that the questioner was his father, he made a strong effort, and added, in a different tone, "if you tell me the name of the sender, I shall be able to give you further particulars."

"It is a bill which I do not intend to pay," remarked Sir Ernest, "from a tailor of the name of Turner: items—a dress coat; ditto, vest; amount, five pounds. I dare say the fellow wishes he may get it."

"I am sure he cannot afford to lose it," said Henry warmly; "I ordered those articles, sir, when, at your desire, I went to Colonel Purday's to propose for his hideous daughter, who ran off with Lord Rondeford before I had time to do it. I could not go to Bellefort Park in a plain shooting jacket; and in the whole of my wardrobe, at that period, there was not a coat innocent of the crime of being out at the elbows: I was forced to order the clothes from some one, and, accordingly, Turner made them."

"And you may pay for them," his father added, "as you would not marry Miss Purday."

"As Miss Purday would not marry me, you mean, sir," retorted Henry: "on my honour, at that time I 'd have wedded Xantippe if she would only have promised to carry me bodily out of

Lincolnshire. If I had known she was secretly engaged to that pauper, Lord Rondeford, why of course I should not have wasted a new coat upon her; but being ignorant of that fact, I did so, and Turner must not suffer for my over haste."

"Or rather want of haste," sneered his father, who had his own private opinions on the subject. "Well, as I said before, you may pay the bill."

"Had I possessed the means of doing so, it should never have been sent to you," said Henry; "as matters stand, I hope, sir, you will settle it. I assure you it is the last account you will ever have to discharge for me."

"Yes, the last—and the last—and the last, for years; no, no, Henry, that won't do with me now; I am tired of that cry, I have no faith in that promise. As I cannot teach you to be economical, I will prevent these tradespeople giving you credit: let them go once or twice without their money, and they will think half-a-dozen times before trusting you again. I have been a most indulgent father; anything in reason I am willing for—anything in reason, but not for bills like this: Turner will never make coats for you again."

"He is a poor man, sir, and has a large family," urged Henry; "it would not be a very great sum

for you to pay, and it would be a heavy loss for him to sustain."

"The heavier the loss, the longer he will remember it," the baronet said savagely.

"He can force you to settle the account," remarked his son.

"Ay! and how, pray?"

"He can summon you for the amount; I am under age," Henry rejoined, hotly.

"Just let him try it," chuckled the baronet, "just let him try it, and I will teach him a lesson he will never forget: but he won't attempt it. Go to law with Sir Ernest Ivraine! there's not a man, noble or commoner, in Lincolnshire who would attempt it: summon me!" and the old miser laughed so long at the idea, that Henry had time to calm down a little ere the baronet had concluded.

"I may have thought, and said, ere now that I would relieve you from the burden of supporting me," began his son, when Sir Ernest's merriment was fairly at an end; "but I have sworn it now: twenty-four hours more, and I shall be off to seek my fortune, or to find a grave somewhere; for I had rather dig the soil like the poorest labourer, than remain here. After to-morrow we may never meet again, and as my last request, as my only

one ere I depart, I ask you to discharge this little debt; it is my only one, and not extravagant. Will you promise me this before I go?"

Once again the baronet broke out into a sort of diabolical chuckle, as he inquired where Henry was thinking of going.

"Out into the world, sir," responded the young man sadly, and in a very different tone from that which he had used during the course of his conversation with his brother; "whither I care very little, whether east, west, north, or south, so as it take me fairly away from this wretched place. Father, I do not want to say anything disrespectful, or unkind, but I have been so miserable here, that I feel I can bear it no longer."

"You have thriven upon it," remarked Sir Ernest, drily, glancing at the stalwart frame of his son; "you do not look miserable, though you talk so much about it: probably all your grief evaporates in words. Now, Ernest appears melancholy; perhaps it is because he never speaks."

"There are griefs too deep for words," murmured Ernest to the smouldering embers, while Henry rejoined:

"How I have looked and talked, you know; how I have *felt*, I know. I have often before

said I would leave home, fully intending to carry that intention into execution when any definite plan of support presented itself. I am resolved to depart now: you have frequently told me I might; that young men ought to battle and struggle for themselves. I shall follow your advice: I shall avail myself of your permission at last, and start to-morrow."

"You will remain for many morrows," sneered his parent.

"The sun of heaven shall never shine on my face here again, unless, after the lapse of years, I return, rich and independent, to prove what a strong will and a just purpose may accomplish for any man," Henry retorted. "If hereafter I should be happy and prosperous, how I would glory just once to look upon these swamps and quagmires again, and think of the weary life I led amongst them, and how I hated and detested the very name of Paradise."

"Henry!" exclaimed his brother, quickly; but the baronet merely laughed, and said,

"Let him go on; it does me no harm, it makes Paradise none the less valuable, it costs no money, nothing but breath, and he has plenty of that to spare: it does him good, let him go on."

"You are right, sir," said Henry, vehemently; "it does do me good on this the last evening of my sojourn under my father's roof, to speak out for once fully and frankly. I loathe this place; for years I have had but one wish—to get away from it by any means. I have thought by day, I have pondered by night, how that object might be best effected; but it was only this morning that I took my final resolution to depart at all hazards, and, please Heaven, I will adhere to it."

"For how long?" the old man asked.

"Through life," Henry answered; "some of our relatives flatter you, sir, for their own ends. I am speaking now, not as a son to a father, not as one who hopes or expects aught from you, either now or at any future time, but as one man might to another, plainly and truthfully; and I say they do flatter you for their own ends, and talk as if Ernest and I had everything in life to be thankful for, if we would only be contented; they trace all the misery of this wretched home of ours to those who, instead of being the causes of unhappiness, are merely sufferers from the evil which has made it what it is. They tell you we are murmuring, dissatisfied, repining; and I tell you what they assert is false: that we have borne

patiently, as few young men would have done, privations and humiliations; poverty in the midst of wealth; parsimony in the lap of plenty——stay, Ernest, as I have begun, I will speak: our youth has been wretched; we have been deprived of everything natural to our age; the poorest cottager has fared better than we; the labourers on your estate have been clad in costlier garments than the sons of its baronet possessor; we have been debarred from society, have not been educated as became our rank and your means, have neither the privileges of children, nor the advantages of men; you will not give us the means to go, you reproach us when we stay. Our relatives say all has been done for our ultimate advantage. They may be correct; but as I never expect to derive advantage from it, I confess it seems to me our present happiness has been sacrificed to a mistaken system. I have been wretched, and a pauper amidst lands and estates sufficient to have made me a being almost without a care. I had rather go forth to encounter any fate than pass the last few years of my existence over again."

"Have you nearly done?" the baronet demanded, his whole frame quivering with anger.

"Almost," said Henry. "I have only to add

that as Paradise has been a place of torture to me, I mean to leave it in the space of a few brief hours."

"I will believe it when you are gone: and Ernest—"

"What he will do I know not," the younger brother returned. "I wish he would come with me. I trust he will be guided to a manly determination; but whether or not, whether he decide to go forth to breast the world as he can, or remain here, will make not the least alteration in my purpose: nothing could turn me now."

"Go then," said the old man, bitterly; "I command you to go out into the world which you think will act a kinder part to you than your father has done; away from those relations whose counsel you despise: do what you like. I renounce you, I cast you off; child of mine you are, heir of mine you shall never be: go forth—see what stuff the world is made of; learn the nature of men; discover what wins their hearts, turns their purposes, sways the destinies of nations, shakes empires, moves the world,—and then repent for ever that you threw from you him, who, for your sake, struggled through years to gain the precious talisman, but who, for your sake, will struggle no longer."

"I know what a blessing gold can be made; I have felt what a curse it may become," the young man replied sadly: "the world can teach me nothing about it I have not learnt already. Aid from you I ask not; but lest hereafter my conscience should reproach me for having uttered some expressions which have just escaped my lips, I request, before we part for ever, you will say you forgive them; for, though true, I admit that, perhaps, I should not have spoken them."

"Always the same," sneered the old man; "always speaking, always repenting: always threatening, never performing; always dreaming, never acting; always murmuring, never satisfied; always extravagant, never reforming; always offending, always apologizing, but never amending; always the same—always—always—till the end of time." And as he concluded this complimentary summary of his son's character, the baronet turned to leave the room.

"I am not threatening, I am not dreaming now; I mean to go: ere daybreak to-morrow, I shall be miles from here. After to-night, we may not meet for years again,—most likely, never: speak to me, say something before I leave this place, which, in all human probability, I shall never see more."

And Henry, who was always in extreme, either of anger or sorrow, laid a hand on the arm of the man, who, with his numerous faults and scanty virtues, was still, and, in spite of all, his father. But the baronet, who had come at length to regard Henry's repinings as mere matters of course, shook him off with a scornful laugh, and murmuring and muttering "Always the same—always—always the same," left the dark chamber, and went out into the still darker corridor beyond.

How long and how earnestly the brothers remained after his departure in that dreary apartment, conversing together, it would be impossible to tell; they stayed there till the stars peeped forth and the moon arose; and then Ernest, wearied and mournful, bade Henry go to rest, and sleep upon it. Upon what? Upon the subject which was to decide his future lot; on the step which might make or mar, elevate or destroy. "He will be calmer in the morning," thought the elder; and thus, after hours of mutual expostulation, they separated for a time.

How often in after years did Ernest Ivraine remember the words and the thoughts of that memorable night, when, sleepless and wretched, he pondered on which path he should take, which

road he would choose; when unadorned freedom and gilded slavery were presented to his choice; when he strove to see rightly by the dim flickering light of prudence, and acted wrongly after all; when it was still in his power to cast the fetters from his soul, but only bound them tighter around it; when he called Henry rash and foolish and misguided, and strove to think him so; when he fancied his own choice was better and more sensible, and felt in his heart he was wrong; when he dreamed for one minute of happiness in distant lands, and shrunk back the next, appalled by the spectre of poverty grimly awaiting him on foreign shores; when he thought, with a wild throb of pleasure, of leaving "Paradise" behind him, and then resolved to remain there, lest strangers should share his parent's gold among them and he be left a bankrupt baronet, a beggar, an outcast,—because of over-impatience, because he could not endure the yoke till his father died.

Ere the faintest shade of grey coloured the eastern sky, Henry stood by his brother's side; he held a lighted candle in one hand, a valise in the other.

"Have you made up your mind?" he asked.

"Yes," said Ernest.

"And what is your decision?" Henry demanded.

"To stay," was the reply; "as you will not remain to take care of your own interests, I will guard them faithfully for you."

"Guard your own," returned his brother quickly, but not unkindly. "I tell you I want nothing, I expect nothing, and I am starting in life—not as the son of Sir Ernest Ivraine, but as a man without a shilling or the hope of making one, excepting by his own exertions. If he make you his heir, I shall say you have earned every guinea by the dreariest servitude ever endured: no prospect of *certain* ultimate wealth could induce me to wait here for it. And remember, Ernest, that misers' wills are often strange documents: you are not sure of riches after years of endurance: you are choosing certain misery for a mere chance. Come with me, and we will show the world what two unassisted youths can do: will you come?"

"No," Ernest returned; "I will not leave unbounded wealth to the cupidity of our relations; I will not cast such a chance from me, when, by enduring a little longer, I may be free to shape my destiny as I like. If I am ever rich, you shall be so too; if not, I, a titled pauper, will then take the step I dread at present. Go out and labour, and be happy if you can, and I will remain and try to do

better for you than you might yourself, waiting and praying and trusting for happier times."

"But not for *his* death, Ernest, not for his death," Henry said solemnly.

"Nothing but his death can ever bring happiness to us, Henry," his brother responded emphatically.

"Oh! Ernest, I never wished for him to die; never even at my worst."

"I often have," was the elder's brief confession, and gazing into his brother's face, after he had uttered the words, he saw him turn pale and faint, as if the sentence sickened him.

"God help you from sinful thoughts and deeds, Ernest," he murmured, as they left the apartment together, and Ernest responded, "Amen."

They walked along the corridor for some yards in silence; but then Henry, pausing by a door almost at the end of it, said hurriedly,

"I cannot leave without seeing him."

A bitter smile curled Ernest's lip at the idea; he could not comprehend his brother's half-instinctive feelings of vague, changeable affection for their parent. He had a settled hatred for the miser himself, and he could not understand how Henry, who had suffered so much that he was casting behind him all hope of wealth for ever, sooner than endure

the thraldom longer, could entertain any other sentiment than that of fixed aversion towards the man who, though he was their father, had darkened their lives, thwarted their wishes, clouded their futures, mortified their pride through years.

"He will not thank you for disturbing him and raising all sorts of horrors in his mind, concerning thieves and skeleton keys," remarked the elder brother with a sneer his parent might have envied; but Henry called softly through the closed door, which was, as he well knew, bolted and barred in the inside.

"Father, I want to speak to you—only one word."

The miser was awake and up in a moment; with trembling fingers he undid the fastenings.

"What is wrong?" he inquired; "what has happened?"

"I am going, sir," said Henry.

"Is that all?" his father rejoined; "I thought, perhaps, some one had broken in. When will you be back?"

"If I live, before I am grey-haired," was the answer.

"A safe reply—time to come and go in: may mean to-morrow, or to-day, for that matter," the old man remarked.

"It does not mean to-day, or to-morrow, or the day after," replied his son; "it means years, long years, hence: when I have made a fortune: when I am a youth no longer, but a man who has fought and struggled and won. I—I could not leave you, perhaps for ever, without one word more—I am sorry for what I said last night; you will bid me good-bye, sir, won't you?"

Perhaps the presence of his brother restrained him from asking a parent's blessing on his enterprise; perhaps he felt that such a word from those thin avaricious lips would have been little but a mockery; perhaps such an idea never crossed his mind: at all events, the brief English honest parting phrase was all he requested, and all he received.

"Good-bye, then," said the old man, who went through the scene as if it had been a sort of farce—(in fact, he considered it as such; the only serious thing he dreaded in the piece being a demand for money); "Good-bye, then," and he held out a long skinny hand, which his son took mournfully.

All the past floated dimly before his eyes: his childhood, his mother, her death, the few kindnesses his father had ever conferred upon him, the many angry and impatient expressions he had made use of towards that parent! He glanced wildly back into

the previous years of his existence, and at that glance all the events, and trials, and purposes, and disappointments, and wrongs, came like spectres at a master's bidding up to view: he gazed forth almost fearfully into the dim, gloomy, uncertain future, into which, without friend, or light, or rudder, or compass, he was plunging: he was leaving a home which, though dreary, had still been a sort of home; a father who, though a selfish, unfeeling man, was his only surviving parent; a brother, to whom he had clung and appealed through years; a place, which, though surrounded by swamps and marshes and desolation, had once been tenanted by a gentle woman, his mother, who, after having bequeathed to her children whatever of good beautified their natures, died in that house which somehow, at that moment, her spirit seemed to sanctify.

Leaving all—a miserable home, a miser father, a melancholy brother! going to a foreign land to face death as a common soldier! departing, certainly for years, possibly for ever! The whole vision of past, present, and future swept rapidly across his soul and softened it; and on that, the last time when he and his father ever met or parted, the young man, forgetful or regardless of Ernest's grave, contemptuous smile, bent down his head over that hand,

which never grasped aught eagerly save a piece of gold, and kissed it.

There was something about the act which touched for an instant the old miser's iron soul; but muttering to himself the words, "He won't go after all; it 's all talk," he only said, "Good-bye, then, boy, you 'll be back soon," and so let his son depart.

A sort of film obscured Henry's eyes as he turned from that door to break all ties asunder: a sentence would have made him stay then—but the old man spoke it not—though a word might have made him depart the next day.

Ere they reached the principal hall, however, the sound of Sir Ernest's voice calling to them echoed drearily through the long corridors. Henry ran back to the foot of the stairs at the summons, his heart beating painfully.

"No, no, it 's not you I want," cried the miser, leaning over the banisters as he spoke, "but Ernest; I can trust him, and you never remember anything. Be sure to see the door is properly shut when you go out; that is all: or stay, I will fasten it after you myself."

And the old man, shuffling down the stairs and across the hall, closed and locked the heavy oaken door upon the departing figure of his youngest born,

and with trembling eagerness adjusted each chain and bar, to see all was in its place, whilst Ernest remarked, as they walked along the terrace together,

"He could sleep if we were in our coffins, Henry, but not if a bolt in the house were neglected to be drawn."

A chill had fallen over the soul of the younger brother as he heard the door bang violently behind him, and the rattling of the chains and grating of the locks smote harshly on his ear: it was his father's farewell to him; it was the last sound he listened to in that house, till, after years of exile, he returned to find his parent dead, removed to that other world where gold and earthly treasures avail not.

The damp morning wind blew not more coldly upon his cheek than the miser's words struck to his soul; winter's frosts never possessed a bitterness of more reality than his brother's brief sentence. Thus Henry Ivraine passed forth, after many resolves and many struggles, as he had said he would, "into the world;" and Sir Ernest, his father, without a regretful or tender word, bolted the door of home behind him. When next he beheld that house, a different hand clasped his at the open portal: another voice bade him welcome back again, for the old man

had gone from amongst his money bags for ever, and the place he had darkened and clouded knew him no more.

For five miles the brothers pursued their way in silence; for Henry was too sick at heart, and vexed in spirit, to utter a syllable, and Ernest cared not for the exertion when it could be avoided; but at length when they reached the London road, and saw by the gloomy light of a November morning, the coach rapidly advancing along the straight, flat, interminable highway, the younger said,

"Now, Ernest, finally decide; will you come with me?"

"No," was the reply; "but will you think thrice and turn?"

"Not for worlds," Henry answered, with a shudder; and, resting his arm on an old stump of a willow-tree which was lying by the road-side, he looked first, sorrowfully, at the dark object coming rolling towards them, and then wistfully at his brother. "I will never forget you," he said at last, in a faltering voice, "in life or in death, never; and whatever comes, whether good fortune or evil, you, Ernest, must never forget me."

Without answering, the elder took the outstretched hand in his, and pressed it in his own; then, draw-

ing a ring off his finger—a plain golden ring, containg a few fine threads of auburn hair—he gave it silently to his brother, with a look which Henry interpreted rightly, "Keep it for *her* sake, and remember me."

As he might have twined his arms when a child about that mother's neck, the departing one now flung them wildly round Ernest, his dark, stern brother: the latter felt his breath warm on his cheek for a moment, and the next heard him calling loudly to the coachman to stop: he saw a hand waving to him from the top of the vehicle, and then the horses, dashing round a curve in the road, bore all from his view, and left him standing there alone.

The one had fairly started off into the world; and Ernest, with a blacker shade than ever on his brow, walked back, even more solitary than of yore, to the swamps, and marshes, and poplars of Paradise.

Henry Ivraine was indeed gone to London to "seek his fortune," and thither we must also proceed, though not to follow him: no—he went there to become a soldier; and we journey thither to make acquaintance with Mr. Alfred Westwood, and—some other people, to accomplish which laudable purpose it is needful to close this second chapter, and commence a third.

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCES MR. ALFRED WESTWOOD.

One chilly day in that most depressing of all English months, November, Mr. Merapie's principal clerk stood in a manner at once easy and graceful before the fire in the outer office. His right foot was firmly planted upon an old-fashioned chair covered with hair-cloth, and thus he was enabled to rest his elbow on his knee, and finally to place under his chin a remarkably slender gentlemanlike hand, adorned with two rings, and set off to greater advantage by a broad linen wristband, white as the driven snow, and fine as Irish looms could weave it.

To attitudinize after this fashion he considered one of the especial privileges of his situation, none of the junior clerks being ever permitted—at least never in his presence—thus conjointly to enjoy the luxury of thought, heat, and dignity, with one foot

supported by the crazy chair, which was giving up its stuffing by almost imperceptible degrees.

Whenever he was in a particularly good, or a peculiarly bad, temper, he assumed the position above indicated, and addressed by turns words of encouragement or of rebuke to his fellow-labourers, as he exhibited his jewellery, caressed his whiskers, and apparently reflected how handsome he was.

For vanity was the most perceptible feature in the character of Mr. Alfred Westwood, whose cleverness was only equalled by his impudence—his impudence by his hypocrisy—his hypocrisy by his ambition—and his ambition by his self-esteem. He was fond of money, not exactly for love of it, but for love of himself. He wanted it to spend in the purchase of expensive broadcloths, fine linens, cambric handkerchiefs, new hats, rare perfumes, macassar oil, gold chains, signet rings, extraordinary soaps, and endless cigars. There was no clerk, or, indeed, no young sprig of the aristocracy, in London who dressed so well, or seemed so confirmed and utterly hopeless a dandy, as Alfred Westwood, whose hair was always arranged after the most becoming and approved mode; whose speech, carriage, deportment, manners, were, as he fondly believed, unexceptionable; who learnt privately all the new dances

as they came out; who was conversant with the appearance of every scrap of feminine nobility that drove in the Park, or rode down Rotten Row; who saw each new piece which was brought out at, and criticised every new actor who crossed the boards of, any one of the theatres; who could wind his way blindfold through the West End—thread all the intricacies of that magic region better, perhaps, than if he had been born and brought up in Belgravia; who, to condense all into one single sentence, desired in the innermost recesses of his heart to be considered a fashionable man about town; and who was, in fact, head clerk in the establishment of Mr. Merapie, a rich, eccentric merchant, possessed of almost fabulous wealth, and residing in the "Modern Babylon."

No man of mortal mould was ever able to get a near sight of the history of Mr. Westwood's life, and read it through from beginning to end. It was currently believed he once had parents, but no one could state the circumstance as a fact of his own knowledge. Sisters, brothers, cousins, relatives, friends, he had apparently none; he appeared merely to be a stray waif, possessed of many personal attractions, floating lightly over the sea of London society, who came of necessity in contact with, and

greeted scores of, his fellow-creatures during the course of his passage from a far distant port to some unknown destination, but who belonged to no one, made a confidant of no one, seemed claimed by no one, was loved by no one—save himself.

He was of what that queen of blessed memory, Elizabeth, would, perhaps, have termed a "just height," inasmuch as he was neither inconveniently tall, nor yet remarkably short; somewhat slight in figure, but extremely well-proportioned; of a fair complexion, with brown eyes, hair and whiskers rather dark than light, and teeth so white and regular, that from a benevolent desire not to deprive society at large of a certain pleasure, he was perpetually smiling in a manner which, although a few disagreeable persons considered it artificial, he himself deemed perfectly bewitching.

But if vanity be of all human weaknesses and follies the most contemptible and unendurable, it is also the least really hurtful to any one, save the individual who, through its intervention, lives in an atmosphere of perpetual self-congratulation; and, had Mr. Westwood's sole characteristic been an unbounded admiration for his own person, he might daintily have walked through life, the City, and his beloved West End, unchronicled, unheeded by me.

It was, however, his leading foible, whilst ambition appeared to be his crying sin. He desired not only admiration, but position; he wished to trade, to amass wealth, to retire, to have a town residence and a country seat, servants, equipages, vineries, green-houses, paintings, grand society; and to accomplish these few trifling desires, he at the age of seven-and-twenty had started, as the phrase runs, "on his own account," with an available capital of ten pounds three and ninepence, and a stock of assurance which, if it could only have been coined into gold, might for years have been drawn upon *ad libitum*, with a positive certainty that any banker in the kingdom would honour the cheque.

But impudence, unhappily, cannot by any process of alchemy be turned into sovereigns, although it may, and frequently does, prove the means of obtaining them; and ten pounds three and ninepence, unlike the present fashionable swimming vests, will not expand to unheard-of dimensions, and keep the fortunate possessor's head above water "for ever;" and moreover, people will sometimes weary of giving credit, and begin to ask decidedly for a settlement. In consequence of all these things, Alfred Westwood, at the expiration of two brief years, found himself "unable"—so he told all whom it might

concern—"to meet his liabilities." In plain words, his debts were just on the verge of seven thousand pounds, and his assets not a farthing above five and twopence.

In the interim he had lived like a lord, kept a cob, hired a valet, and lodged in St. James's: and when in due course he passed through the Bankruptcy Court he blandly told the commissioner his expenditure had been most moderate—*only* six hundred per annum; and in an extremely genteel accent entered an indignant protest against an illiberal and insulting demand made by his creditors (when he politely appeared, at their desire, to answer their questions, and afford them all the assistance in his power), that he should give up, for their benefit, his watch, chain, rings, and eye-glass, with which articles he had adorned himself, to the end that he might, even in ruin, look like a gentleman.

But remonstrance proving vain, with a sigh he relinquished these unpaid-for mementoes of happier days, made a full statement of his affairs, solemnly affirmed he and he alone was the party deserving of commiseration, and proved to the satisfaction, though decidedly not to the gratification, of all present, that, let him be what he might—knave, simpleton, dupe, schemer, or fop—nothing in the shape of

compensation could be wrung out of him, whether freeman or prisoner; that he had no friends who would "stand by him," or, in other words, pay them; that a merciless prosecution would do him little harm, and could not, by possibility, benefit the sufferers in the slightest degree; that, finally, it was worse than useless to fling good money after bad; and therefore Mr. Westwood escaped better than a better man, and was permitted to go on his way rejoicing.

Although he thought an immense deal on the subject, he said "never a word" when he heard his creditors were about to insure his life, in order to secure themselves, if possible, against total loss; but apparently contrite, broken spirited, and broken hearted, did all that was required of him, meekly got the requisite documents filled up and signed, went quietly before the ruling powers "to be viewed," and have the probabilities of his death discussed and the consequent rate of premium decided on; patiently held his peace for a period, and permitted those whom he had so deliberately cheated to complete their part of the business ere he, with a grim smile on his lips, began his.

What with actual anxiety, slight indisposition, and two or three sleepless nights, he found himself

sufficiently ill to be able to carry his project into execution with a chance of success; and, accordingly, discarding all useless ornaments, with a very shabby coat, hair neither glossy nor well arranged, and a hat which he had dinged a little for the occasion, he repaired to an insurance office, where he well knew his life was considered a matter of some importance.

He desired to speak with the principals upon important business, he said; and on the strength of this assertion, he was ushered forthwith into the "presence chamber."

"Gentlemen," he began, in a cool, straightforward manner, "I believe you are rather interested in my longevity; I am Alfred Westwood, formerly a merchant, now a beggar, whose creditors have insured my life in your office."

The fact being accurately remembered, the individuals thus addressed bent anxious glances on his face, scrutinized him from head to foot, and mentally calculated how many premiums he was "good for," whilst he proceeded:

"I have come, therefore, to inform you, with feelings of deep regret — regret, more of course on my own account than yours — that I fear you will very speedily be called upon to pay the

various policies which have been effected in this case."

It certainly was a somewhat startling announcement, and the two elderly and one middle-aged gentlemen, to whom he so tranquilly communicated the likelihood of his demise, exclaimed in a breath,

"Good heavens! it is not possible——"

"With all due respect," returned Mr. Westwood, "permit me to remark, it is not merely possible, but probable; my death *must* take place ere long, so far as I can see; not, indeed, from any disease that medicine or skill is able to cure, but because of a malady, from the certainly fatal effects of which you, and you alone, can deliver me."

"We!" ejaculated the trio, once again in unison.

"You, gentlemen," solemnly responded their visitor.

"And what may the malady be, and how can we avert it?" they demanded.

"The malady is starvation," he replied, concealing, by a desperate effort, an almost irresistible inclination to smile; "money or a lucrative employment will save my life and your pockets. All my worldly goods, everything, in short, I was possessed of, save a tranquil conscience and the clothes I now wear, I made over to my creditors.

What man could do more? and yet they are not satisfied; their malice pursues me so relentlessly that, in consequence of their evil reports, I can obtain no situation, no matter how humble. I am not fitted, either by education or constitution, for manual labour, even were such offered to me: I have no friends able to assist me: I have brains, talent, energy, — would prove invaluable to any person requiring an active, indefatigable clerk. I desire not, indeed, to make a new character for myself, but to demonstrate that which has been asserted of my present one is false. I have been unfortunate and wish to repair the past; but every office is closed before me, every mortal seems prejudiced against me. People will not permit me to work, I cannot beg; in fine, gentlemen, I must starve unless you, for your own interests, aid me in this dilemma. Recollect, I do not ask you to do this for my sake, but for your own; for I know quite enough of human nature to believe self is the motive power that turns the world, is the mainspring of men's actions, is, in brief, the sole reason why, although I do stand in need of sympathy and compassion—though I am a ruined man, though I have been more 'sinned against than sinning,' you will help me."

Westwood was right; he had studied the worst part of human nature intently, and judged it correctly. Had he possessed the eloquence of a Demosthenes, he could not more speedily have struck the feeling in the hearts of his auditors, which he desised to reach, than by thus quietly stating that, if they did not at once lay out a small amount, either of time or money, to save his life, they would most probably have to pay, ere long, a large amount, in consequence of his death. His tale was a likely one enough; his haggard looks confirmed the statement; gold, they were satisfied he had none; it might be perfectly correct that almost insuperable obstacles precluded his obtaining employment; further, he had not flattered them; and even business men are too apt to fall into a trap baited with what, although a few persons term it contemptuous rudeness, uttered either for a motive or from chagrin, most others style frank, truthful sincerity. At all events, one thing was, as he stated, self-evident; it was apparently their *interest* to serve him, and accordingly, as he was clever, shrewd, and plausible, they speedily did so. The principals of the insurance office to which the creditors had paid premiums, held a sort of perplexed conference together; the end of which was, that a situation, not

very lucrative indeed, but still a "start," was procured for Mr. Alfred Westwood. He received five-and-twenty pounds for pressing necessities, to slightly replenish his wardrobe and enable him once again to appear as a "gentleman." In short, he got, for the second time, fairly afloat; and when the *ci-devant* bankrupt found himself again in a position to earn money, he gaily twisted his whiskers, passed the men he had, in plain words, "robbed," with a high head and confident air, and mentally murmuring, "I was too fast before, I will be slow and sure this time," commenced, *de nouveau*, the struggle of existence, not as a pleasant experiment, but as an important reality.

Years passed on: some termed Alfred Westwood a conceited fop, but others affirmed he knew perfectly what he was about: he always dressed well, perpetually kept up appearances, apparently denied himself no gratification, retained one situation until he saw another likely to suit him better, but not a moment longer; became noted for shrewd cleverness and long-headedness; mounted fortune's ladder cautiously, and, with a vivid memory of his former desperate tumble, never took his foot from one step till he was morally certain of being able to place it on the next, and keep it there; finally, he entered,

at a salary of two hundred per annum, the counting house of Mr. John Merapie, as assistant to the principal clerk, and in that capacity did so much more than the above individual had ever dreamt of attempting, that, at the expiration of one brief year, Mr. Westwood found himself next to Mr. Merapie, chief of the establishment,—vice Roger Aymont superannuated, or, in other words, superseded.

And thus, patient reader, it came to pass that, at the not very advanced age of thirty-five, Mr. Alfred Westwood, possessed of a comfortable income, tormented with no incumbrance, in the shape of invalid father, helpless mother, insane brother, delicate sister, or tiresome child, stood enjoying the luxury of his own happy thoughts, as previously chronicled at the commencement of this chapter.

"Westwood" was the word which brought his foot down and his head erect in a second of time —"Westwood."

"Sir," responded the individual so addressed; having elicited which mark of attention, Mr. Merapie proceeded:

"I have to attend the Lord Mayor's banquet this evening, and should therefore feel glad if you could make it convenient to meet my sister, Mrs. Frazer,

who, as you have heard, is coming from the North, and see her safely home to the Square."

Whereupon Mr. Westwood, smiling in his sweetest manner, declared, "Nothing could give him more pleasure."

"Thank you—wouldn't trouble you if I could avoid doing so," returned Mr. Merapie, "but necessity, you are aware——"

"Knows no law," supplied his clerk with a deferential bow, which bow fairly taking Mr. Merapie away from the outer office, and leaving Mr. Westwood temporary master of the inner one, he at once repaired to the latter, drew two chairs close together opposite the fire-place, leant his head against the back of one and disposed his limbs in a graceful attitude upon the other, crossed his arms majestically over his chest, and remained thus pondering and calculating chances till the time arrived for him to go and make acquaintance with the new comers, Mrs. Frazer and her two children.

Carefully as he might have scanned the pages of a book wherein his fortune was written, did Alfred Westwood scrutinize the faces of the "widowed and the orphaned," whom he, a stranger, thus met and greeted on their arrival to an almost unfamiliar place.

He beheld a languid, fashionable-looking lady, a boy, in whom her very soul seemed centred, and lastly, a slight pale child, with nothing especially remarkable about her, save a pair of soft mellow eyes, a perfect wilderness of dark curls, and a peculiarly quick intelligent expression of countenance.

Alfred Westwood noted every gesture, feature, word, as he conducted the trio "home;" and when, after having seen them and their luggage safely deposited in Mr. Merapie's house, situated in what that gentleman termed "The Square," he turned to walk to his own lodgings by the bright gaslight through some of the countless London streets, he murmured, as if by way of conclusion to some very knotty argument he had long been debating within himself, "They may prove of service to me, perhaps; at all events, I defy them to raise an obstacle in my path."

CHAPTER IV.

MINA.

FROM London to Loch Lomond! Kind reader, do not call the transition a leap. In the alphabet it is not a step; in this book it merely involves the turning over one page and commencing another; whilst in that generally awful thing which we so briefly term "reality," it is but comfortably taking up a defensive position opposite one's fellow passengers in a railway carriage, eating at intervals with incredible velocity, changing trains occasionally, being wearied to death travelling for a certain number of hours at various rates of speed (*vide* Bradshaw's inexplicable Guide), coaching, and perhaps boating a little,—and the thing is happily accomplished. London, *pro tem.*, becomes to the tourist a dream of memory, whilst Loch Lomond gradually assumes the character of a fact.

Would that any pen—whether plucked from the

wing of a lineal descendant of her who saved Rome, or manufactured by Gillott, or tipped with gutta percha, or made of imperishable gold—were gifted with the same amount of actuality as that same wonderful *chemin de fer*, which in these later days conveys one so rapidly from amidst the ceaseless bustle and turmoil of man's work to the majestic grandeur and awful truth of God's; from the "great city" to the lonely country; from the flush of England's roses to the glow of Scotland's heather; from the rich flatness and eternal sameness of the South to the rapid streams and boiling torrents, and mountains and moors and glorious scenery of the North, —and I would write as I feel of that portion of this lovely world, where the waters dance and the mountains frown, and the deer wander through trees upon sunny islands; where history, and time, and events, and nature, have all combined to cast strange spells over every height and hollow, every lonely moor and narrow gloomy street, making all enchanted holy ground.

O Scotland, dear Scotland, ennobled by heroism, sanctified by religion, great in misfortune, steadfast in principle, unparalleled in genius, beautified with the tear-drops of sorrow, hallowed by the steps of warriors, patriots, high-souled men, noble hearted

women, authors, poets, painters; where Bruce fought and Wallace died, and a fair queen wept, and Rizzio sang, and myriads of the great departed sleep tranquilly,—who ever dared to speak of thee, after him whose name were alone enough to bear thine triumphantly down the river of time, to the point where that river becomes merged in the ocean of eternity, that did not waste his energies and mar his theme?

But who would not give something to be able to say he was born within sight of Ben Nevis? who would not relinquish much to speak of that country as "Fatherland"? who, even in these utilitarian days, would be so commonplace and unromantic as not to desire to have a native's right to pluck the blooming heather, and call the place where it grows so luxuriantly, home? who, in fine, would not, even with a very indifferent guide, turn over the page and stand for a few minutes in imagination one August evening in a garden rich in all rare flowers and sweet perfumes, and richer still in commanding a view over that stern old lake, Loch Lomond?

You, reader, I know will oblige me by doing so, when I add that the mental journey must be performed ere you can learn some further particulars of those so briefly and unceremoniously introduced

to your notice at the conclusion of the preceding chapter.

The setting sun was flinging a sort of glory across the lake: trees looked brighter, and mountains grander, and islets lovelier, and waters clearer, and ruins lonelier as the last rays of the proud lord of day fell on and lit up them all; and upon something loftier, more imperishable, more apparently transitory—yet millions of times more precious in the sight of the universal Creator—did those warm beams fall softly,—on the heads of a grey-haired man, one some ten years his junior, and a child.

For a brief period the eyes of the two former—of those, created not for time merely, but for eternity—dwelt with a glance of strange, unutterable admiration, in which a mournful expression mingled also, upon the earthly panorama, with its ceaseless change, yet endless sameness; but at length with a deep drawn sigh, the elder turned from his contemplation of nature to speak to the child.

"You should have more patience, Mina," he said, half chidingly; the flowers will bloom, and the seeds come up, much more rapidly without your assistance, believe me."

The little girl, to whom the above remark was addressed, had been busily engaged in pushing the

rich fine mould from the top of a bulbous root, to ascertain if the same were actually sprouting; but she paused in her employment for a moment, whilst the gardener, who completed that trio, standing in the midst of a sort of fairy Paradise, so near to Loch Lomond, added,

"Ye dinna gie the bits o' things time till do onything, Miss Mina, for ye are never but pulling them out o' the ground althegither, or else shoving the earth frae off them, long before they're half ready, to see if they're growing."

The child raised her head as he concluded, and casting back a profusion of glossy curls from her face, and shading her eyes with her hand, looked confidently into the countenance of the first speaker as she answered,

"It's because, uncle, they won't be green half quick enough: when Colin puts the seeds and roots and things in the ground, I can wait, indeed I can, for a day or two; but it's impossible for me to believe they are really growing after that, unless I see them; that's why I pull them up."

"And to you, Mina, it seems a very sufficient reason, I have no doubt," returned the old man with a sad smile; then, addressing the gardener, who, like himself, was a sincere follower of Calvin,

he added, "You see how the want of faith comes in everywhere, Colin; we are blind creatures, yet delude ourselves into the belief that we can alter the current of our destinies, and compel circumstances, just as Mina here fancies, by looking, she will make the plants grow sooner. We repine at the trials God sends us, as if He did not see and know and order what was best for us. There is a lamentable absence of faith throughout the world—of trust in the breasts of all."

"'Deed and ye may weel say that, sir," mournfully acquiesced Colin; "the Almighty surely has great tholing with us."

"But I don't think," interposed Mina at this juncture, "that I can *make* them flower any quicker than they would do of themselves; only when I cannot see them, it is quite impossible for me to believe they ever will blow—that 's it, uncle."

"But do you not know, Mina," he returned, "that although the earth may, and does, hide the seeds and bulbs from you, it cannot do so from God? You should, therefore, leave all in his hands, and wait patiently for the result."

"Yes, yes," was the response, uttered so eagerly that it bordered on the very confines of irritability, "I know He sees them, and makes them grow;

but sometimes, too, He lets them die, and so I just push the mould back a wee weeny bit, uncle, to see if they are living or dead."

"And so kill half poor Colin's annuals from over-anxiety and want of belief," he said, looking sadly on the child, whilst the gardener groaned forth an interjection concerning the "old Adam," which, reaching Mina's ear, caused her to exclaim,

"Papa says, Colin, it is not fair for you to be always blaming him without just cause; for that in regard of Mina and the flowers, it is not old Adam, but young Eve that 's in fault."

A sad smile broke for a moment over her uncle's face, but immediately it vanished; and bending a look full of mournful import upon his niece, he said,

"Your papa is far too fond of you, Mina, I fear."

"And he fears I am far too fond of you," she returned, moving closer to the old man's side; then, taking one of his hands betwixt her's, which were covered over with mould, and looking wistfully up in his face, she inquired in a subdued, altered voice, "When will my dear papa be well?"

"Soon," answered her uncle, averting his glance from hers, and gazing away, with a troubled expression of countenance, into the far distance—"soon."

The gardener fastened his eyes for a brief moment upon him who had uttered the simple monosyllable, then bending towards a white moss rose tree, that the action might remain unnoticed, he wiped something wondrously like a tear from his cheek, with the back of a horny hand; after which, he glanced cautiously at the child.

She had buried her face in her little palms, and tears came streaming abundantly through the fingers, making strange long tracks amidst the clay upon them. At first her grief was silent; but, at last, hearing a half suppressed sob, her uncle withdrew his eyes from the spot where the sun was setting, and bending them mournfully on the slight young figure bowed now in the agony of its first bitter sorrow, he asked,

"Why are you weeping, Mina?"

"Because you said it — so —" she cried.

"How?" he demanded.

"As if —, as if —," she gasped, "though you said 'soon,' you did not think it."

"Did you ever know me to say anything I did not think?" he gently enquired.

"No," she responded.

"Well then, Mina, dear little Mina, I did indeed

mean your papa would soon be well—in heaven—but never here."

A sharp wild cry escaped the trembling lips, when this answer broke the stillness of that lovely summer's evening, and freeing herself from the kindly hand which would have detained her, Mina sped with the fleetness of the wind towards the house, up a flight of stairs, then along a corridor, and finally into a room, the windows of which looked westwards to the hills and the mountains, where the sun was setting.

In that chamber a life was ebbing away. More rapidly even than the golden tints were fading from the sky, was consciousness retreating from the frame of him, who, the child's uncle said, "loved Mina too well:" who, even in death, hearing her weep and expostulate with those who would have denied her entrance, murmured faintly,

"Don't make Mina cry—let her come."

"Papa, my own papa," she whispered in a choking voice, raining tears over his face as she nestled close to him, "say you are not going to die—to leave *me*."

His lips touched hers for a brief instant, and he faintly answered, "only for a time;" but the child, flinging her arms around him, shrieked out in her

agony, "Oh! papa, take me with you—*wherever* you are going, take me too."

If he could have done it he would; he clasped her convulsively to his heart, and even whilst he did so, ceased on this earth—to be. He had gone to that land where troubles enter not; but she remained to breast all sorrows as she might.

"He is dead," said some one in a low solemn tone; and at the sound of that brief sentence, Mina shrunk back appalled from the sight of that which had been her father and was not. A loving friend bore her away from the room; there was a mist before her eyes for a minute; she did not understand—she could not tell exactly what had happened. It seemed to her a horrible dream: time came when she *knew* it was an awful reality.

The widow was counting the dreary hours as they dragged on during the course of that interminable night: her son was standing weeping by her side; the lonely watcher by the bed of death had fallen into uneasy slumber; the candles were burning dimly, and those who thought of Mina at all imagined the child was sleeping also, when a little figure clad all in white, its face pale as that of the corpse, its feet bare, and its eyes tearless, came noiselessly stealing into that chamber, whence a soul

had but lately departed. It drew very close unto the side of the couch; it looked long and earnestly in the stony countenance of the dead, then timidly laid a childish hand on his.

"Lord bless me, Miss Mina, what are you doing?" cried the woman, starting at length from sleep, and alarmed at the sight of the intruder. "What are you doing?"

"Watching my papa," was the response.

The person, whose employment Mina had thus, in a manner, taken from her, gazed at the child for a moment; then said in a low earnest tone,

"Are you not afraid?"

"No," answered Mina, "not afraid — only —" a sort of shudder shook her frame, and she paused in her reply.

"Miss Mina," continued the woman, "this is no place fit for you; you ought never to have been here; you will let me take you back to bed, won't you?" and she arose to do so: but Mina put her arms around her neck, and exclaimed so entreatingly and mournfully,—

"No, no; let me stay with you: I cannot bear to be alone or away from him; it makes me far more frightened: let me stay,"—that, whether right or wrong, she was permitted to remain

The woman wrapped a shawl around her and took her on her knee, and held her to her heart, and bent her head down over her, and thus they talked in whispers about him, and how good he had been, and where he was gone; until, finally, towards morning, perfectly exhausted with weeping, and sorrow, and excitement, Mina dropped her head upon the breast of an honest, though not perhaps very sensible, humble friend, and fell into a dreamless sleep; from which, when the sun was high in heaven, she awoke with a premature knowledge of grief in her heart, and the memory of *that* scene to be a sort of dreary companion through life: never again, no, never! to seem in aught, save years, what she had actually been twenty-four hours previously—a child!

How soon the curtain of existence rises before some! for how long nought save its pleasant side is revealed unto others! What an utter folly it seems to count age by years, when the heart of the boy is sometimes older in all life's saddest experiences than that of the gray-haired man! What peaceful or pleasant incidents illumine most of the chapters that make up the story of a fortunate few! what stirring or depressing scenes form, on the other hand, the preface to the eventful book of existence in the histories of most!

And how frequently also does the first circumstance that brings knowledge of grief to the soul, prove a sort of type of those which must, if life be spared, succeed thereto: from girlhood some women seem destined to watch by the bed of sickness, tend the invalid, read to the aged, bring with noiseless feet, and gentle words, and willing hands, and bright sweet smiles, sunshine into dark places; whilst others again appear born to be witnesses of, or actors in, scenes of violence, sin, or misery—from infancy words of anger or recrimination sound incessantly in their ears. And as thus the first solemn reality of life which Mina Frazer ever beheld was the corpse of her father, so it was fated that many of the incidents in her lot in after years were to be chequered more with darkness than light.

It was perhaps a dread of this, arising from actual knowledge of the state of his nephew's affairs, the character of his widow, and the nature of the child, that caused her grand-uncle, the old laird of Craigmaver, the head of the Frazer clan, to look with such a double portion of anxious sorrow on Mina as she twined her arms around him, and laid her head upon his shoulder and wept there, when he came to talk a little to her on the day of her father's interment.

"Poor little Mina," he said, twisting the long curls round his finger, and speaking in a very tremulous voice. "My dear child, poor little Mina."

The sobs grew louder as he uttered these words; but, at length, she murmured in a reproachful tone,

"They have taken away my dear papa: they have buried him."

"God has taken his soul, Mina," replied the old man; "we have only buried his body. Don't you like to think, dear child, when you look up, up, away into the clear blue heavens, that he is there waiting and watching for you?"

Mina dashed the tears from her eyes and gazed for a moment at the azure sky, as if endeavouring to realize the idea to herself; but then she dropped her face once again on the breast of her relative, and answered, with a choking sob, "No."

"No," he echoed in some astonishment, "why not?"

"Because, I am sure," she wept forth, "my own papa would rather I was with him. He won't be happy waiting and watching for me; I know he won't, he wanted to take me with him — but — but—he had not time—or—something."

And at the bare memory of *that* farewell she cried till her hair was damp and wet, as it fell loose

and unregarded over her face. She could not understand death. Ah! which among us can? It grew to her a stranger mystery, a sadder thought, the more she, in her vague terrified childish way, reflected concerning it.

"He *knows* now what we *believe* here, Mina; that whatever lot is appointed for us by the Great Disposser of events, is for our good. Had it been well for you to go to heaven with your dear father, God would assuredly have permitted you to do so. Do you comprehend me, my little niece? What I mean is, that He is able to order all things, and does order all things for our ultimate happiness; if not in this world, most certainly in the next. Do you comprehend me, Mina?"

"Yes; I know what you mean."

"And you will be very good, and try to feel it, won't you?"

"Yes," she answered abstractedly, pushing back once again the curls from her face, and gazing up at the sky beyond which he had said her father was; but somehow the sight of the corpse had clogged both her faith and her imagination with much of earth's heavy clay; and the funeral and the churchyard were to her much more tangible and frightful, than heaven with its joys was real and beautiful.

"I wonder——" she murmured.

"What?" her uncle inquired.

"Whether, when God can do all things, he took the spiders out of my papa's grave;" and a shiver told the horror wherewith the things she had lately seen and reflected upon had inspired her.

"He could do it," answered her uncle, after a painful pause, "if it were His will."

The trembling little hands grasped his almost convulsively, as Mina returned,

"Yes, but I am afraid He would not, uncle, and —and I have been thinking about that ever since they said he was to be buried."

"You hear and see and think about a great many things you should not, Mina," said her relative, half sorrowfully, half sternly; and the remark was perfectly true, but it was not her fault that she did so. "Who puts all these ideas into your mind, tell me, dear, who is it?"

"No one; they come of themselves, and I wish they would not," she answered simply, clasping both hands across her forehead, "for they make me feel so unhappy."

"And I wish they would not either, Mina," he said, "for they make me unhappy too;" and he fixed a troubled look on the young face, as if striv-

ing to read something of her future destiny from that treacherous index.

"I suppose," Mina continued, "it's because I cannot help thinking about things that mamma calls me; 'a strange old-fashioned child,'—my papa never said that:" and once again a deluge of tears came streaming from the dark eyes, and her relative had no heart to say anything more to her then, excepting, "My dear child, my poor little Mina!"

Who could have rebuked the tender creature—the wild love she felt for, and the strange thoughts she entertained regarding, him who had most erroneously imagined his daughter to be perfection; who had fancied her prettier and better than any child that had ever previously existed; who used to take her with him everywhere—riding, driving, walking, boating, over the mountains, across the moors, on the water—to visit his relatives; who encouraged the wayward fancies which the lonely life, the desolate scenery, and above all, the lack of young companions, engendered in her; who had dreamt that life must be bright unto his little Mina, and who had died just when a doubt of the correctness of this idea first entered his mind.

"He spoiled the child," every one said, "and made her too much an object of his constant care:"

and accordingly, when people heard Captain Frazer was dead, the first question that sprung to the lips of most was, "What will little Mina do?" for it was well known that whilst the father lavished his affection on his daughter, the mother bestowed hers on her son: of course she felt attachment for both, but it was by no means an equal one; for whilst her very heart was wrapt up in the boy, who was handsomer and gayer than Mina had ever been, she somehow always felt that a very sufficient gulf yawned betwixt herself and her youngest born. "That old-fashioned incomprehensible creature," as she remarked to her friends in private, "whom the captain is bringing up, I sadly fear to be a perfect little oddity;" and the lady shrugged up her shoulders, and visitors and confidants condoled with her in becoming terms upon the dreadful misfortune that threatened the slight delicate girl: for it is one of the most beautiful things in our most unexceptionable state of society, that whilst affectation is cultivated as one of the graces of life, oddity, or in other words, originality of character in either woman or child is considered a sort of sin, a contagion to be avoided, a monster to be smothered in its birth.

And thus it came to pass that most persons, save

those who were themselves eccentric, mourned over Mina Frazer, or else pitied her and her misguided parent in terms which hovered much nearer the confines of contempt than those of love; and even her uncle, who was one of those true undemonstrative men whom in these later days we reverence and honour with such a treble portion of respect and admiration, because we so rarely encounter them, sorrowed over the child whilst her father lived, because he feared he was far too fond of her; and after that parent's death, he grieved doubly concerning her, because she had no relative left on earth, save himself, possessed of the capability of bestowing on her even a tithe of the affection which had been lavished on the strange pale child by him, whom Mina said, "would have taken her with him, only he had not time, or—something."

CHAPTER V.

RENDERS A CHANGE OF ABODE NECESSARY.

Death and poverty—perpetual travellers, who seem to take pleasure in dogging each other's footsteps from house to house—had, as too frequently proves the case, entered the abode of the Frazers almost simultaneously.

The husband, having invested all his fortune—ten thousand pounds—in some absurd speculation, which was, so he once affirmed, to give him "thirty thousand for his daughter's portion, and plenty more besides," was so overwhelmed at the first mention of a possibility of failure, that he sunk under the violence of his grief and anxiety, never to rise again; and the very day after his demise, letters from a mighty city brought unto that lonely nook the intelligence that, not merely were "the thirty thousand pounds not coming, but that the ten thousand had gone."

It is sad when death enters any door, but it is sadder still when poverty follows the ghastly visitor through the portal the latter has left open behind him, bringing a double portion of sorrow into that home where sorrow enough previously abode.

To weep by the corpse of a dearly-loved friend is bitter, we have all felt; but to be, in addition, anxious concerning the vulgar matter of daily bread, to have to consider, almost ere the funeral train be out of sight, how life is to be supported, creditors satisfied, a shelter provided, children fed, clothed, and educated, is a something so repugnant to every feeling of human nature, that it rarely carries its burden of sorrow bravely, but too frequently sits hopelessly down in its despair and declares the attempt utterly useless, unless friends or relatives will lighten the load with the magic touch of gold.

Mrs. Frazer never thought of making the attempt at all, however, whether aided in her endeavour or not; she was one of the apparently most amiable and really most helpless amongst the innumerable descendants of Eve; she was grateful for money, if it were given cheerfully or obtainable readily, and could spend it, as some of her sex can, without a thought of whether she were making a good use of it or whether, when it was exhausted, she would be

able to obtain fresh supplies: so long as gales from those blessed islands called, in our vulgar tongue, banker's coffers, filled the sails of her bark, the lady floated on happily, tranquilly; she could ask for gold, receive it, smile sweetly in return for it, change it away for things of doubtful value and still more questionable utility,—but make it! A pilgrimage to the moon would have sounded to her quite as possible a proposition as for her to do aught to increase her income. And so nobody ever did suggest such an impossible project unto her: she was perfectly prostrated by the death of her husband and by the loss of his fortune, but she dimly reflected, "When I was a child, my father provided for me; when I became a wife, my husband did the same; and now I am a widow, somebody will give me all I require?" and consolation and encouragement came with the idea into her mind.

Had his creditors not taken the property of the late Captain Frazer into their own hands, she would have entreated the laird of Craigmaver to "put matters to rights for her;" as it was, the above procedure saved him trouble and her trouble, and left both at liberty to quit Glenfiord, a place which had now become unendurable to her, and proceed northwards, accompanied by Mina and her son;

for the widow unhesitatingly accepted the offer of a temporary home at Craigmaver till her future plans were matured,—till, in plainer words, she heard whether her rich bachelor half-brother, Mr. Merapie, were going to " act a brother's part towards her and make Malcolm his heir and promise Mina a fortune."

" Take the cottage near Craigmaver and have a comfortable little farm yard, just sufficient to provide us with milk and butter and eggs for our own use, and send Malcolm to school, and live with Mina here on fifty pounds a year!" she exclaimed one day, about a month after her arrival, in answer to the laird's remonstrance against her journeying south. " My dear uncle, you must be dreaming; why my father allowed me more than that for dress alone when I was a girl, and your nephew, Allan, though not very rich, had still what made us comfortable, five hundred a year besides his half-pay and Glenfiord; it is all very well to talk of people being contented and coming down to their situation; and some, perhaps, can do it, but I was not brought up to come down to my situation, and I could not and would not even dream of doing such a thing. John will never let me want, I know; and Malcolm, poor child, has set his heart on entering the navy, and how could he enter the navy here; and I

should perfectly die of *ennui* amongst these savage hills if I had no carriage and did not visit Edinburgh every winter. No, no; my brother is right —we ought to go to London; it is my native place, you know, and whenever Mina is better we shall set out."

"I think," suggested Mr. Frazer, "that you might live comfortably here; your expenses would be very small; my people should attend to your poultry and garden: the house is small, I admit, but still large enough for you; I would be always near to assist or advise in any emergency: and surely," he added, with a smile, "our mountain air must be as pure, and our Highland scenery is more beautiful than any you will meet with south of the Tweed."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," she said, "to propose all this; but I have finally determined to accept John's offer: there are such advantages about London, everything to be had that you want, nothing to do but pay for things and they are with you in five minutes. London possesses everything that a rational being can desire, excepting beautiful scenery, and you know I never cared for that."

Which was perfectly true, for even in her youngest and most romantic days, Mrs. Frazer would have

preferred the present of "a duck" of a new silk dress, to the sight of the loveliest view that eye ever rested on. But if she liked the city streets, Mr. Frazer thought he knew a little creature who would pine amongst them; so he said:

"Well, perhaps you are right, and I confess mine was not altogether an unselfish proposition, for I desired to keep you all near me; but I wish greatly that, at least for the present, you would leave Mina here: she is so delicate, so susceptible, that I fear this sudden snapping of all old ties may prove most injurious to her; the child will break her heart in London, pent-up in the house or else sent out for stated walks, after the liberty to which she has been accustomed."

"Her father permitted her to run wild," returned the lady pettishly; "she will be a deal the better for a little restraint; she is still young enough to be brought into training. I really sometimes tremble to think what a strange unmanageable creature my poor dear husband was making her,—letting her do just as she pleased—run out without bonnet or gloves, getting her complexion ruined and her hands the colour of rosewood—work amongst clay and sand, and even soot—and talk to servants and poor people till she acquired all their extraordinary

notions. She told me the other day, that she was very nearly as fond of Colin Saunders as of you: now only think of her even saying such a thing!"

"Well, I have no doubt she only spoke the truth," responded the old man; then, after musing for a few minutes, he said, "And I suppose you will send the little wild mountain sprite to some fashionable London school, where she will have to learn all sorts of lessons, and be laced up in stays, and have to wear tight shoes, and either say what she does not think or else keep all her thoughts to herself; and instead of the affectionate heart she now possesses, she will grow ashamed of caring much of anything save herself and the fripperies and follies of fashion: she must either change her nature or break her heart. My poor little Mina! will you leave her with me?"

"If I had no other inducement for leaving this country," said the widow rather angrily, "Mina would be a sufficient motive to make me do so. The child has been perfectly ruined, and in a town and amongst other young people, I pray she may lose that eccentricity which now distinguishes her. She has the strangest ideas and thoughts, and the most disagreeable way of giving expression to them: one of her convictions at present is, that no one

excepting herself, you, and Colin is really grieved at her father's death." And Mrs. Frazer applied her handkerchief to her eyes as she recorded this crowning sin, and shed a few tears in a very proper manner, while Mr. Frazer reflected that Mina was not very far wrong; for so long as her son lived, his nephew's widow cared very little if all the rest of the world died; and, besides, the idea of leaving a country and a people she had always disliked and of returning to the joys and bustle of England's metropolis, had tended not a little to banish her sorrow and make her regard the demise of her husband, who had been, as she thought, absurdly attached to his native land, not quite so great a misfortune as she might otherwise have considered it. Her brother, Mr. John Merapie, would give her a handsome house, servants, equipages, everything, in fact, she wanted; for she knew he was enormously rich, and resided, moreover, in that mighty Babylon where everything, save peace of mind, is to be purchased for ready-money—cash on delivery.

"I do not say," resumed Mr. Frazer, after an unsatisfactory pause, "that I ever considered poor Allan's system of education, or rather of non-education, so far as my little Mina was concerned, peculiarly fortunate or beneficial. If you will leave her

with me, I intend to try if it be not possible to make her less a child in some ways and more a child in others; to eradicate many strange ideas which I admit she has acquired, and to teach her those absolutely necessary things which her indulgent father said 'she was far too young to be teazed learning.' In one word, I would endeavour to improve and enlarge her mind, without changing her heart; only let me keep her for one year, and if, at the expiration of that period, you do not think her considerably altered for the better, I will resign all right and title to her. Will you permit her to stay?"

"My dear uncle," said the lady impressively, "I would do any one thing in the world to oblige you except this; I know perfectly well what Mina's faults are and why they are: so long as Allan lived, I could not interfere, because he thought Mina could do no wrong, and considered her very defects virtues; but now the case is different. I am quite persuaded that so long as she even breathes the air of Scotland she will remain unmanageable: I wish her to associate with other girls, to be instructed in feminine accomplishments, to be drilled into the decorums of refined English society, to acquire a certain *retenue* of manner, and, above all, to be re-

moved from vulgar associates, who, I verily believe, would soon teach her to speak broad Scotch and eat haggiss."

"The latter accomplishment she has become perfect in without the advantage of masters," remarked Mr Frazer, with a smile; "but to return to my petition: leave her at Craigmaver for twelve months, and I promise to preserve her from contact with the commonalty; her accent shall be kept as pure as any accent out of England can be; and should you make the same a *sine qud non*, I think that I can ensure that she shall not acquire any dreadful penchant for our national and, by consequence, heathenish dishes: she cannot possibly learn any harm here; and, with the blessing of Providence, I hope to be enabled to teach her some good."

"I am sure," responded Mrs. Frazer, "it is uncommonly kind of you to take such an interest about her; I do not understand why you should do so—if it were Malcolm I could comprehend it better—and Mina never can feel sufficiently grateful for all the trouble you wish to have on her account: but indeed it cannot be; it would be a most impolitic arrangement, to say nothing of the appearance to the world. My brother is so very rich, that it would be imprudent not to make her dependent on him;

for he can afford to educate her regardless of expense. There are no advantages in Scotland of any kind; in fact, no one can ever, strictly speaking, be termed a "gentlewoman," unless she has been at a first-class London school. Five, I think, of the very happiest years of my life were passed at the most expensive seminary in town; for my poor dear father never regarded money when I was concerned. It would be almost a sin to deprive Mina of opportunities for improvement such as I enjoyed: and in the course of a few months she will grow to like London, and be quite a changed being."

Mr. Frazer had been silently contemplating the lady—who, reclining gracefully on a very comfortable sofa, with a sort of widowed and ladylike grief on her countenance, had in a very languid tone uttered the above sentence—and the conclusion at which he speedily and ungallantly arrived was, that if his nephew's wife was the result of five years' fashionable training, on the whole the Glenfiord system might be deemed preferable. For the old laird had never, even in her loveliest and best days, entertained any especial affection for her whom Allan Frazer—then a young subaltern, with an income barely sufficient for his own support, and a fortune of just one thousand pounds, which he

settled on her—had wedded against the advice of his friends, and the consent of hers, for love. There was much anger, then forgiveness, then a handsome allowance from her father, who it was expected would leave her a considerable sum at his demise; many congratulations from military acquaintances on the happy termination of his matrimonial speculation; a little active service, and then, Allan Frazer, a captain on half-pay, falling, through the death of a relative, into possession of Glenfiord and ten thousand pounds, retired, to his wife's inexpressible chagrin, from the bustle and excitement of town life, and made but one single step from the gaieties of London, balls, picnics, country quarters, to the utter desolation and solitary grandeur of Loch Lomond!

But circumstances had lately occurred which rendered her opposition of the slenderest and most useless description. The love, born of fancy not of reason, which had lighted in a moment in the young Scotchman's imagination, and been blown into something like an intense blaze by the breath of opposition, died out when that opposition was withdrawn almost as rapidly as it had kindled. Since time immemorial, ill-natured people said "the Frazers had been considered more charming in their manners,

than constant in their attachments;" but whether this assertion were correct or not, whether the fault lay in the nature of the husband or the character of the wife, one thing is certain,—after a few years Allan found himself frequently smiling, in a somewhat bitter manner, at the idea of his ever having been absolutely "in love" with the graceful and heartless Englishwoman—so much in love, indeed, as once to have seriously contemplated the desirability of suicide when obstacles, apparently insurmountable, appeared to bid defiance to their union.

Thus, even whilst her father lived, even whilst backed by money, friends, position, Mrs. Frazer at length discovered that her influence over her husband was of the very slightest description; and when, after the demise of her father—who had in his generation been esteemed one of the Babylonish merchant princes—it was discovered that he had died just at the proper time, leaving behind precisely what covered his funeral expenses, and no more,—Captain Frazer took, as some men will take in such cases, a much higher tone than formerly with his refractory wife, whose resistance to aught which he wished from the day when *her* supplies were stopped, became of that nature which is generally called passive.

He was always kind to her,—for if the Frazers did choose wives absurdly and rashly, and repented them of their impetuosity, when repentance was worse than a folly, they always did treat anything connected with them of the feminine description, whether mother, sister, wife, or daughter, kindly—after a fashion. If they could not give love, they gave what very frequently does just as well, courtesy: they never quarrelled and argued, but politely expressed their desires, and expected them to be complied with instanter. They never said, "You must, madam;" but their quiet "You will, my dear," had to be obeyed perhaps even more rapidly than a more peremptory command from less determined lips. In a word, when all the money and influence and power lay in the hands of the *ci-devant* captain, he carried his wife captive to Scotland, and set her down in a very beautiful cage, surrounded by everything for which she did not care—scenery, sterling hearts, flowers, beauty, perfume, solitude—and the only happy portions of her life during the ten years she spent in the land of cakes and easterly winds were those brief periods passed in the ancient town of Edinburgh, where Allan had no objection to take her, and go himself, for three months out of every dreary twelve. The world was good enough to re-

mark what an extremely united couple Captain Frazer and his English wife appeared; and, in truth, externally they did "get on" charmingly, for he gave her, without hesitation, a liberal supply of money; paid her bills, and never frowned at their amount; had a *bijou* of a phaeton, drawn by two Shetland ponies, made for her especial behoof; and to sum all up into a lady's sentence, "was an *excellent* husband."

For if he were not devotedly attached to her, neither was she to him; and he permitted her to indulge and spoil Malcolm to even a greater extent than he, as Mrs. Frazer affirmed (though not in his hearing), "ruined" Mina; and each allowed the other to pursue his and her own separate path, without much hindrance or molestation: and if people be not very fond of, and most tolerant towards the faults and foibles of, one another, believe me the wider apart their paths are—even should those paths be matrimonial ones—the better.

And thus matters progressed peaceably and pleasantly enough, till Mr. Frazer's death cut the Gordian knot (which men and women are perpetually tying in haste with their tongues to the end that they may repent at leisure in their hearts) for ever; when, as we have seen, the disconsolate widow

left Glenfiord, and repaired to Craigmaver, preparatory to a still longer journey home to the land of her birth, her affections, and her hopes.

After what has been advanced concerning the manners of *all* the individuals composing the Frazer clan, from the laird down to the hundred and sixty-second cousin, towards that largest half of humanity styled so emphatically by our polite and lively allies, "*le beau sexe*," you, most patient reader, will readily believe that Mr. Frazer never permitted anything like the time occupied in the above somewhat wearisome, but most necessary, digression to elapse between the termination of his visitor's remark and his rather melancholy reply thereto.

"And so you will not comply with my request, and I must part with the child who has been more unto me than many a daughter is unto many a parent? Well, well, perhaps I was foolish to expect a different decision, and I hope and trust and pray the step you are now taking may prove for her ultimate good both here and hereafter; but there is a presentiment on my mind—which, like the vision of the seer, oppresses my soul, and makes me speak when, perhaps, I ought not to do so—that in that far distant city where you propose taking her, and under fashionable instructresses, my dear little Mina

will either remain just what she is, and become perfectly miserable, or else change so completely as to render those who love her best upon earth wretched for her sake. There are great materials in her character to bring forth either evil or good, according to the seed which may be sown: but I leave all with humble trust in the hands of Him who can guide her, there or here, and keep her always in the straight path that leads so surely unto heaven."

Mrs. Frazer had raised an embroidered handkerchief to her face to conceal a yawn during the progress of this speech, and at its conclusion answered:

"As you most justly remark, there is a Providence which overrules the destinies of individuals dwelling in London as well as at Craigmaver. I prefer the former; and I have no doubt but that Mina will be very good and happy there, and when you next see her, you will admit she is greatly improved." And as if she considered the discussion concluded, and desired that it should be so, she arose, and taking her relative's arm, led him through one of the open windows of the drawing-room into the garden beyond; and the old man, looking around at the mountains and the firs and the distant valleys, sighed as he wondered how any one who *could* stay

amongst such scenery would voluntarily choose to quit it.

The autumn had completely passed ere Mina, still very pale and weak, was pronounced by a dreadful old Highland doctor—who took snuff and called Mrs. Frazer "My leddy," and talked to her in Scotch so harsh, that it excruciated her refined Saxon ears—at all fit to travel: but cold and dreary though November might be, the widow determined to depart immediately,—"*Anything*," as she impressively said to her English lady's-maid, "being preferable to a winter at Craigmaver."

"And so, Mina darling, we have to say good-bye in real sorrowful earnest," said the laird to the child, a few minutes before the time of parting actually arrived; "in real sorrowful earnest," he repeated, looking mournfully upon her.

"Going away, dear good old uncle," she cried, putting her arms about his neck, "to the great big toun as Colin calls it, which he says is the 'head quarters o' Satan;' going away from everything—far away, where I can't see you: nobody to love Mina there."

Mr. Frazer kissed a large tear from the quivering eyelids, as he answered somewhat doubtfully,

"You have your mamma, Mina."

"And my mamma has Malcolm, uncle," she quickly responded; "but I am to go with cousin Allan to say 'good-bye' to Colin—poor Colin:" and even as she spoke, she took the hand of the old laird's grandson, a stripling of some seventeen years of age, and went forth with him, quietly and tearfully, to bid her humble friend farewell."

"I 'm going, Colin," she said, stretching out both her little palms; "good-bye."

The gardener gazed dimly on her through a kind of film that, spite of all his efforts at composure, would obscure his sight.

"Ye 're goin' hundreds o' miles awa' frae us a', Miss Mina," he said, and the words were uttered in a harsh hollow tone, "an' we 'll never get a sight o' ye again, never!"

"Yes, yes, you will," she rejoined; "I mean to come back to Craigmaver when I 'm a young lady, and live here always."

"Ah! you will think differently, then, Mina," said her cousin Allan; "you will soon forget Scotland and Craigmaver and all of us: won't she, Colin?"

"I 'd tak' an oath, if the like were needed, that she winna forget even a single daisy on the moors, Maister Allan," returned the gardener vehemently;

"but wherever ye be, or whatever ye think o', gude go wi' ye, an' God tak' care o' ye; I could na wish ye a better wish, Miss Mina, if I talked for a year."

"What shall I send you from London to remember me by, Colin?" she asked.

"When ye are writing to the laird or Maister Allan, for I believe ye can write finely, Miss Mina, send me word ye are well, and sometimes ask 'how is Colin?' it is all I want; I need naething to remember my dear old master's child by—naething!"

"But you must have something for yourself, something you can look at and think I sent you," she persisted: "Oh! I know now; I 'll buy you an English mull, which you can use on Sundays; and then, when I am going to church in London, I 'll think you are carrying it to kirk with you at Craigmaver; won't that do, cousin Allan? I can't stay any longer, Colin," she added, hearing her mother's maid calling for her. "Good-bye! I 'll never forget anybody here; and when I 'm old, I 'll come back to Craigmaver to see you all: indeed I will—good-bye!"

She was gone; the gardener gazed after her as she ran towards the house: he stood as if turned into stone. In a few minutes the noise of carriage wheels grating on the gravelled drive aroused him,

and climbing hastily a mound which commanded an extensive view of the southern road, he watched the receding vehicle till it became a tiny speck in the distance, and finally was lost altogether to view.

"For goodness gracious sake," exclaimed the lady's-maid, who occupied a seat in the carriage opposite her mistress's daughter; "for goodness gracious sake, Miss Mina, whatever 'ave you been a doing to your 'air?"

"I just cut off two curls for my uncle and Allan, and don't torment me about it Haswell, because I had not time to take off my bonnet again and get at the back ones; they will grow again, and if they won't, I don't care:" by way of conclusion to which 'orribly naughty speech—as that perfect lady's-maid, Miss Haswell, styled it—Mina relapsed into another paroxysm of grief, and wept and sobbed so that her mother became satisfied she was about to have some kind of a fit; and acting upon that impression ordered the driver to stop the carriage, as though such an act were likely to produce the least good effect under such circumstances. If the horses' heads had been turned back the case might have been a little different; but as Mrs. Frazer had not the slightest idea of doing anything of the kind, and as scolding and remonstrances, and even stop-

ping, proved alike useless and unavailing, Mina was at length permitted to cry in peace, which accordingly she did till she was so perfectly exhausted that she could cry no more.

But other tears fell that day at Craigmaver, from the eyes of a true-hearted, and—though he did yield to the weakness which men scoff at—sensible Highlander, who wept, as he said, "sair," to think that his dead master's child was going away so young and so unwillingly, "into the world"

CHAPTER VI.

FANCY AND FACT.

Had Mrs. Frazer been thoroughly aware of to whom and to what she was going, perhaps she might have delayed some considerable period weighing the pro's and con's, on both sides, before she finally determined to reject the old laird's offer; and if, after all, she had set forth on her Southern pilgrimage, it would have been with a much more mournful face, and a far heavier heart than any person had ever supposed to belong to, or dwell in the breast of, the widow of Allan Frazer, Esq., late Captain in His Majesty's ——th regiment of Highlanders.

All she knew positively concerning her brother may be summed up in a very few words. He was fifteen years older than herself—a bachelor—and extremely rich.

Owing to the disparity of their ages, and the fact

that John, disliking parental control, especially in commercial matters, had at the early age of eighteen "started for himself," there was little intercourse betwixt them before Mrs. Frazer's marriage; and after that event, letters from the London merchant to the Scottish gentleman's wife came to Glenfiord at such rare intervals, that, like the Lord Mayor's show, they only served to remind the fashionable lady there was such an individual in existence—until she required help from him, until the choice lay between "London with John Merapie," and the "Highlands with the head of her husband's clan:" then quick as lightning she bethought herself how wealthy her brother was; how delightful it would be to preside over a grand establishment in her native city; how splendidly he could provide for Malcolm and Mina; and how liberally, she might feel certain, he would act towards her.

And so she wrote to say, "I am beggared;" and he, by return of post, offered her a home and a cordial welcome,—which letter filled the poor lady's weak brain full of all sorts of absurd ideas concerning "fashionable life in London;" self, children and brother, visitors, servants, house, equipage and furniture, being the heroes, heroines, and etceteras of the tale she so speedily imagined—but which

like many another, better and worse, fiction before and since—was never, spite of the admiration its authoress felt for the same, destined to be published.

How gladly she would have turned that dream into a reality, how fully she expected it to become such, she herself and one or two others came in time fully to understand; but she had, unhappily for her own comfort, started on wrong data: she had taken a supposititious house for her brother, furnished it with a vision, placed him therein with a false character, and finally repaired to London under a delusion, in order to see the "whirlwind from the desert come," and level with its practical breath all the fine airy castles she had comforted herself—since Captain Frazer's demise—with building.

"John is rich—of course he lives in style—of course he will do whatever I ask him, as my poor dear father used." So reasoned the lady, and on this reasoning she managed to create for herself a great and most unexpected disappointment; for nothing more different from his sister's mental portrait of him can be conceived, than John Merapie. He was a man whose character might be thus briefly described:

"He liked his dinner; and he hated humbug."

Now humbug, which was one of his pet expres-

sions, meant in his unrecognized dictionary, everything which he disapproved of—or rather, everything for which he did not care. He thought marrying a humbug—but not money; he considered fashion a humbug—but not a good fire; he deemed it a humbug to care about where you lived—but a piece of solemn necessity to take care where you dined; he denounced music as a humbug—but not mince pies; he was perfectly satisfied fine ladies were "regular humbugs;" but had a sort of reverence for a capital housekeeper—that kind of thing, you know; he despised grand furniture, but gloried in politics; thought tea only fit for women, but had a high opinion of port wine; declared he detested evening parties and white kid gloves, and all such humbug, but enjoyed a quiet rubber of whist, or a social evening with half-a-dozen "steady-goers," as much as mortal man ever did. People wondered, when he had such an antipathy to affectation and folly, that he got on so admirably with Alfred Westwood; but the merchant mildly advised some one who ventured to propound the question unto him—"Just try to cheat Westwood out of a sovereign, and note the result; I don't care, sir, what he seems, there's no humbug in him, and what's better than that, there's no deceiving him with it. He can see further into the City

than any man in London, and that is saying all I can for him." Which observation, it may be added, had reference, not to the City buildings, but to the City people; Burke's "Who's Who" of the West End, not being more voluminous than Westwood's Who's Who, of the East—the former taking cognizance of the great at Court; the latter, of the firm at the Bank; the one publishing volumes about landed gentry, the other making telling concise little notes concerning merchant princes. It was small marvel Mr. Merapie thought his clerk clever, for he seemed to know by intuition how every man's "book" stood; whether he had over-drawn, or was possessed of "a balance;" if his wife had a fortune; for how much he was "good," whether he would stand or fall, and if he fell who would "go" with him, and how much could be raked up out of the ruins. It was something perfectly horrible, to the uninitiated, to hear how Mr. Alfred Westwood had characters and capitals, and probable bankrupts and doubtful bills at his finger's end—and, if need were, also on the tip of his smooth silvery tongue—for such astonishing revelations occasionally give one the feeling, that there may be mercantile as well as political spies; detective officers, not the less dangerous because amateur, in the counting-house as in the streets.

But this was just what John Merapie required, a clever fellow who could tell in two minutes, "who was who," and "what was what"—at any time, in any place; and he liked his clerk, and forgave his vanity, and imagined Mr. Westwood had a heart-interest in his concerns; and it never seemed to enter the worthy merchant's brain that his subordinate was working, not for him, but for himself—not for John Merapie, but for Alfred Westwood—not for a fortune to his principal, but for a partnership to crown his own individual wishes and deserts.

And thus the shrewd merchant, who spent half his leisure-time denouncing other people's follies, completely succeeded in "humbugging" himself into the belief that a man, who, for years and years, had thought of nothing, cared for nothing, but himself, was going to turn round at the eleventh hour, and work disinterestedly and conscientiously for his employer. What wonder, then, that when Mr. John Merapie, through the beautifying medium of vanity and hope, lived in London under one delusion, his weak, foolish sister, Mrs. Frazer, should come to London labouring under several.

It grieves me to be at length reluctantly compelled to disclose that the "Square" to which, in

the brief conversation recorded in Chapter III., between Mr. John Merapie and his clerk, the former so familiarly yet mysteriously alluded, was none other than Belerma—without exception the dreariest, dingiest, and most depressing four-angled place of at all respectable habitation to be met with in the whole of the vast metropolis.

Fashionable readers may, perhaps, deem this name a fictitious one, and I admit it is not discernible amongst any of the West End Squares composing what may be termed a "genteel set" in society; yet, no doubt, if we only traced back its history far enough, there would be found in its annals—as in the pedigrees of many people who now are low and poor enough—sufficient proofs of former grandeur to fling a sort of dim aristocratic halo over the now desolate and deserted Square, where no one ever penetrates who can avoid doing so, which is approached by a few narrow twisted streets, which seems lonely and silent as the grave, though hardly ten minutes' walk from some of the noisiest London thoroughfares.

Like the poor and the reduced, whose day of pride and glory has passed away for ever, Belerma Square could tell its tale of former gentility, were speech but vouchsafed unto the stones of its pave-

ment, or the walls of its mansions: perhaps the feet of nobles once crossed the thresholds of those dingy tenements; treason may there have been hatched; beauty has graced the now empty apartments; lights have there sparkled, glad voices made melody; music has floated through open casements over the now stunted blackened trees and shrubs, that make a sort of mockery of a pleasure ground in the centre; existence was there entered on, death encountered, sorrows endured; tears have there flowed, laughter echoed; men and women, the great, and fair, and good, and noble of the land once lived, rejoiced, and suffered there; and yet, in spite of its having at one period been something more than respectable, "select," the very name of Belerma Square is blotted out from the memories of the descendants of those who once resided there—the present aristocrats of Belgravia. Stone walls may be possessed of ears, but, as a general rule, the power of speech hath been denied unto them; and partly because of this, greatly because of the whims and vagaries and changes of fashion, Belerma Square, like a corpse wherefrom breath and spirit have departed, has been left to moulder away into the dust of antiquity by the vast human tide which, in these later days—growing broader, stronger, and

more unruly—has swept, with common consent, towards the West, and settled temporarily in those regions which, though now deemed unexceptionable, some future chronicler of high life in London will, in due course, assuredly scoff at as being too far East for the sun of fashionable society to shine on; for it may not be altogether out of place here to remark that the luminary which irradiates genteel people dwelling in England's metropolis, unlike other and commoner suns, rises in the West, and sets there also, without flinging even a solitary beam of light upon the East.

New things have become old, and old have disappeared from view; and strange events have varied the history and altered the apparent destinies of kingdoms and races, since the noble of the land raised mansions in that now neglected corner of the metropolis, and dwelt therein; and its name, like that of Moore's heroine, "is never heard" spoken by anybody who is anybody, in any place that is any place. Therefore I regret to confess the merchant tenanted—stay, he did more, he owned one of the dreary-looking brick houses forming the southern side of the quadrangle called Belerma; and it can scarcely be marvelled at if it went unto the very soul of the newly-made widow to discover that *her*

brother was actually dwelling in such a locality. For, owing to his having for years flitted about from lodging to lodging, seeking rest and finding none; his being one of the briefest, and driest, and most uncommunicative of correspondents, and his requesting all missives, whether business or private, to be addressed to his office, situate (as no letters can be forwarded to him now, there is no necessity to be very precise) between London Bridge and Wapping, the overwhelming fact of his having, in default of a better tenant, installed himself in one of three houses he had bought—of course, a "dead bargain," but which turned out almost a "dead loss"—remained an unsuspected mystery at Craigmaver.

When he wrote kindly and shortly, offering his sister a home, he merely said, "My house in the 'Square' is large enough for us all, and, if you think you will be more comfortable here than in Scotland, pray come immediately, only let me know what day to expect you:" in consequence of which extreme brevity he left Mrs. Frazer in a state of happy ignorance concerning the exact distance from Belgravia at which his home might be; or what number of hundreds per annum he paid—as she felt sure he did—for liberty to set himself down a West End man, who made all his money in the East.

She hoped for Grovesnor; she would have been content with Berkeley; she could not urge any particular objection to Cavendish; but aught on the other side of Regent-street, the lady had obstinately discarded from her imaginings. True, time had been, when she considered Gower-street—where her worthy father, removing himself and money-bags out of the city, retired to spend a fortune after he had made one—something perfectly unexceptionable, quite grand enough for any peer in the realm; but school had speedily opened her eyes in this particular, school and (after her marriage) genteel society: so during the whole of her wedded life, when any inquisitive acquaintance enquired in what part of London her juvenile lot had been cast, she answered vaguely and carelessly—"Oh! the West End"—and calmed her conscience, which asserted she had told a fib, by thinking,—"comparatively it was so." "Comparatively" with the City or St. Luke's, perhaps!

"Belerma Square," she gasped forth on the evening of her arrival, when Mr. Westwood, in his most silvery accents, assured her that was indeed the goal towards which the cab's snail's pace was tending: "Belerma Square! my dear sir, you *must* be mistaken; my brother could never dream of inviting me to such a place."

"It is his present home," was the emphatic rejoiner.

There was a pause, during which the widow swallowed her chagrin and amazement as best she might: then she drawled forth, as if to account for the phenomonon—

"Bachelors do live in such strange places; and after all it does not much matter where they reside"—

"As we must be miserable even in palaces," added Mr. Westwood; which speech, as it was intended it should, showed the lady *he* was a bachelor, though the smile that accompanied it implied, a tolerably happy one.

"Oh! I did not mean that," returned Mrs. Frazer, "what I intended to remark was, they are not obliged to keep up appearances in the same way as if heads of families."

"We are not, indeed," assented Mr. Westwood, still resolutely adhering to the first person plural.

"No one ever enquires where an unmarried man lives," resumed the widow, pursuing her own train of thought without reference to his, "excepting some bachelor friend, who likewise resides in an extraordinary locality; but when there are ladies, of course matters must be differently arranged: I shall speak to my brother on the subject directly."

"I believe," remarked Mr. Westwood, in his most soothing tones, "I believe Mr. Merapie has purchased the house to which I have the honor of conducting you."

"That can make no difference," rejoined Mrs. Frazer: "he must let it for a shop, or a warehouse, or something. In fact, I mean to tell him he must discard all his bachelor modes of life at once, and take a house in a genteel neighbourhood, and give me what I have been since infancy accustomed to. I never should have left Craigmaver or Glenfiord, to live in Belerma Square; and of that my brother is perfectly well aware. He can merely intend this as a temporary home, and it will do remarkably well for that, till we can select a more suitable one. We must have a long conversation about these matters; I know he will do precisely as I wish."

Mr. Westwood politely said,

"He felt satisfied no one could do otherwise," and civilly thought: "Well, how this woman can be even half-sister to John Merapie is a mystery I cannot solve; but, if she think to drag him into fashionable life, or to persuade him to do any one thing he does not feel inclined to do himself, she will find herself most miserably mistaken."

Having finished which mental soliloquy, complimentary both to the merchant and his sister, the clerk handed Mrs. Frazer to the door of Mr. Merapie's house, they having at length arrived there; and, after giving her and her children "in charge," as it were, of a grim old housekeeper, and declining to enter the drawing-room and sit down, though specially invited to do so, and saying "Good night!" to the trio, individually and collectively, Mr. Westwood went quietly home to his lodgings, murmuring, as he walked, the sentence duly chronicled at the conclusion of Chapter III.

Very wearily and very discontentedly did Mrs. Frazer survey the furniture and appointments of her brother's house, on that, the night of her return to the City where she had been born—to the place she had pined for years to see.

"This will never do," she murmured, as she glanced around at moth-eaten carpets, and faded curtains, and antique chairs, and dingy mirrors; all of which articles John Merapie—who, to do him justice, cared as little for what he called "frippery" as any man in existence—had picked up at auctions and old furniture stalls, either personally, or through the instrumentality of an agent. "Not a particle of taste, or fashion, or refinement, or comfort, or even

cleanliness; this will never do—never—never:" and having, after a mournful scrutiny, arrived at this conclusion, the widow first partook of tea and toast and muffins with what appetite she might, and then ascended the broad creaking and, after the first flight, carpetless stairs, and went drearily to bed; where she lay awake half the night, thinking what she should say to her brother on the subject of his *ménage*, and where she would like to ask him to take a house, and of what coloured damask the drawing-room curtains should be. Having decided which latter point in favour of amber, she fell asleep and dreamt they were dwelling in Hyde Park Terrace, with only a brick wall and French satin paper dividing them to right and left from a dowager Duchess and a spendthrift Earl.

Ostensibly in honour of his sister's advent, but more probably in consequence of the Lord Mayor's banquet—which, by the way, Mr. Westwood had informed the widow his principal was *compelled* to attend—Mr. John Merapie permitted the day to be "thoroughly aired" before he descended to the breakfast parlour, where he discovered Mina and Malcolm sitting very peaceably together on the hearth rug, discoursing, as they looked into the bright blazing fire, about Craigmaver, their journey, and their new home.

The children arose at the entrance of their uncle, who, laying a hand on the head of each, welcomed them kindly. He gazed first with something wonderfully like admiration at the boy, whose personal beauty, bold carriage, graceful movements, and gay laughter-loving temperament, more than half excused his mother's excessive partiality for her first-born; but, then, the merchant casting a more attentive glance on Mina, was so struck by the delicacy of her appearance, that he involuntarily exclaimed,—

"How ghastly pale the child is, to be sure!"

"Poor Mina has been very ill, you know," explained her brother.

"Ah! true. I had forgotten that," said Mr. Merapie (which, indeed, was perfectly correct). "What made you so ill, Mina."

A bright flush coloured her cheek for a minute, and the dark eyes became moistened as Malcolm answered, in a low hushed voice,

"Crying for her papa."

The merchant looked from one to the other, from the bright healthy boy to the little fragile girl; then stooping, he abruptly kissed her forehead, after the fashion of a man to whom such an exertion was a rarity, and saying almost tenderly, "She must get

better here;" placed a chair for her close beside his own at the breakfast table, and added that, as their mamma was going to take coffee in her own room, there was no necessity to delay the morning meal any longer.

And whilst engaged in the pleasant task of despatching that which, next to his dinner, an Englishman considers the most important business of life, Mr. John Merapie remained happily unconscious of the storm which was raging in the bosom of his sole female dependant—to wit, the grim housekeeper afore honourably mentioned.

"New lights shining through old windows, indeed," she angrily muttered, wending her way up the interminable stairs conducting from the kitchen to Mrs. Frazer's apartment on the second floor. The widow's own servant being, as she said, "so hoverdone with that 'orrid journey from that 'eathen place," as to be incapable of eating any breakfast herself, and, consequently, of procuring the same for her disconsolate mistress. "New lights shining through old windows, indeed, when ladies can't come down to breakfast, but must have it trailed up three flights of stairs to them. Mr. Merapie may get another servant to attend to the children, and keep this grand lady's-maid to wait on his sister, or else

take my warning; and that I shall tell him before I am two hours older. Fine work, truly, fires lighted in bed rooms and dressing rooms; I suppose one will be wanted in the drawing room next; and coffee carried in cupfuls up sixty-six steps—neither more nor less, many a time I've counted them. And John Merapie's sister taking her breakfast at eleven o'clock in the day, as if it were second nature to her, and may be so it is."

Which soliloquy terminating at the door of the lady's chamber, the housekeeper flung it fiercely open and deposited the tray she carried with such a bang on the table, that a portion of the contents of the coffee cup was jerked over into the saucer.

"Gently, gently," gasped Mrs. Frazer, withdrawing her eyes from a wrapt contemplation of the ceiling, upon which she had been writing out a mental inventory of the furniture needful to make a house "habitable." "There, that will do, thank you: pray stay for a moment till I see if it be sweet enough. Ah! scarcely, it requires a *little* more sugar."

"Will it not do?" demanded the housekeeper in a tone that surprised Mrs. Frazer into asking,

"Why?"

"Because it's sixty-six steps down to the sugar

from here, and sixty-six up again, and it's not a journey I 'm fond of taking if I can help it," was the response.

"You will have to go, even before we remove to another house," thought the widow; but she merely responded, "In that case you can bring it with my next cup — and — if you have a little, cream also."

"Cream," repeated the woman, "we London folks makes milk do us; cream is not to be had for nothing here, ma 'am."

"It is not to be had for nothing anywhere," responded Mrs. Frazer with wonderful temper; "but, still, as it is obtainable for money, and as I have been accustomed to it, we must get a little; that is all. However, you need not mind it at present. I shall speak to my brother about a number of things I wish attended to. Will you tell him, when he has quite finished breakfast, I should like to see him here."

And the widow sinking back on the sofa, waved her hand, after the manner of a queen, unto the incensed housekeeper, and languidly commenced sipping her coffee with the air of an amiable martyr, whilst the dethroned potentate went grumbling down the stairs, humming a tune, the purport whereof Mr. Merapie's sister little suspected.

"Cream, indeed! less might do her father's daughter, I think: a better man than she is a woman—and that's John Merapie, my master—never put up to airs like that; you never would have heard his voice in the house; he never said yet to me, 'Crooked was a bias.' Ay! there are very few like him, very; and she thinks she will be able to lead him about with a silken thread; get him to make a fine lady of her; and leave all his money to her children, ha, ha! I know something she does not, and that Westwood does not, but that Westwood would give gold to hear; but he won't hear it from me yet, may be, never—may be, never." And so she went on, muttering and mumbling, and shaking her head and clenching her hand, till she reached the hall, where, encountering Mr. Merapie, she delivered unto him, first his sister's message, and then added,

"And, sir, I think it's just as well for me to tell you I do not intend to stay here any longer than you can well suit yourself; but, if you have no objection to my still staying on in your service, sir, I have none to the country;" and the expression of the woman's face became perfectly diabolical as she spoke, so full was it of cunning, and mystery, and meaning.

The merchant flung a hurried glance behind him, as if fearful of being overheard, then answered in a low tone, slipping, at the same time, a golden coin into her hand,

"We will speak of this another day; meanwhile, I rely on your discretion."

"You may, sir," she replied, nodding her head, partly over the money, partly at him, "you may, sir, and that you know."

Upon the strength of which assurance, Mr. Merapie repaired, though not with an unclouded brow, to the room where his sister awaited his advent.

CHAPTER VII.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

Nothing more undemonstrative can possibly be conceived than the meeting betwixt Mr. John Merapie and his sister, Mrs. Frazer. With even less appearance of his ever having done such a thing in his life before, than that which characterized his salutation to Mina, the merchant, having a vague idea that such things were usual upon similar occasions, and inwardly mourning that they were so, gravely kissed his sister; having accomplished which feat, to his immense relief, he drew a chair beside her sofa and inquired, "If she felt better."

"Still very much fatigued," was the response, "I did not get to sleep last night until long after you returned home, thinking about how very miserable you must have been."

The merchant started, and enquired somewhat nervously what she meant.

"Oh! living all alone in this dreary house, and having no one to look after your wants excepting that dreadful old woman (John, I cannot pretend to tolerate her), and being buried in this out of the way place; and having no lady's taste to furnish your house properly for you."

"I am sorry," returned her brother with a smile, "you have so unnecessarily sacrificed your night's rest to my concerns: I have, like most other people, had my share of trials, but certainly never dreamed of classing my house, furniture, and servant amongst them. I expect, of course, that now we have actually got you here, this place will look a little more like home: I trust you and yours will be happy, Eliza; they appear remarkably fine children."

"Oh! Malcolm is the very best, cleverest, dearest boy that ever existed; but as for Mina——"

"Why what is wrong about Mina," demanded the merchant, finding that a dead blank was intended to express volumes in the child's disfavor; what is wrong about Mina?"

"Everything," responded the lady, "mind, manners, ideas, appearance, everything."

"Excepting her excessive pallor, and the extraordinary way in which she has cropped her hair on one side, I see nothing greatly amiss with her appear-

ance," he returned; "and Malcolm tells me the latter was done in great haste, before leaving Craigmaver, that she might give the curls to her uncle and cousin: and as for the paleness, we both know the cause of that, Eliza."

"Yes, but it seems so unnatural in a child to keep pining and crying, for months, when we were all doing what we could for her; she is far too old-fashioned; her father perfectly spoiled her, she never cared for the things other children do, never enjoyed herself like them, and her sorrow more resembles that of some strange-tempered old woman, than a little girl's transient trouble. I do not comprehend her; I never could."

"But surely Eliza," exclaimed her brother sternly, "you, who are her father's widow, do not mean to blame Mina for weeping so bitterly for him?"

"Not if she would have done it like a child," retorted the lady angrily, "but she did not. After I had worn myself to a perfect skeleton, nursing her through the low fever which detained us so long in Scotland, the first thing she said, when consciousness returned was, "Where is my dear papa? I had rather have him than anybody else in the world—where is he?" and when I told her "she must lie very quiet and not ask for him as he could not

come to her any more, but that I would stay near her if she chose;" she said, "Oh! I remember now; but I care for nobody except him," and began crying and sobbing so violently that she brought on a relapse, which had almost proved fatal."

Mr. Merapie answered not, but gazed earnestly at her who uttered the above sentence. Worn to a skeleton she was not, either by grief or watching—that fact was self-evident, and the small place Mina occupied in her heart was no less apparent. "Poor little creature," mentally exclaimed the merchant, recalling the pale, thoughtful face to memory; and, albeit by no means given to feel much concern about the sentiments and trials of his neighbours in general and the sentiments and trials of children in particular, on the present occasion something marvellously like compassion came swelling up in his bosom on behalf of the fragile girl, whose mother loved her so very little.

After a pause, devoted to useless expectation of an answer of some kind from her brother's lips, Mrs. Frazer proceeded.

"But why talk of Mina? she will improve now she is away from those horrid Highland mountains and vulgar Scotch people, and thrown more amongst children and associates of her own rank

in life! I know she will, I wanted to speak to you of our future plans."

"I thought," remarked Mr. Merapie, "they were quite settled,—that you were to reside with me."

"Of course," returned his sister, coloring a little, but I presume you do not propose continuing to live in Belerma Square."

"And why not?" demanded Mr. Merapie.

"Why not?" she echoed; "it is so dreadfully unfashionable."

"And, my dear Eliza, of what earthly consequence is fashion either to you or to me; will it support, clothe, educate your children? Can it contribute one iota to our happiness? Fashion is a word which has destroyed more domestic peace, wasted more fortunes, made more homes desolate, and finally, caused less real joy to mortals, than any other in our language; it is a perfect humbug."

"But you don't mean to say," began Mrs. Frazer, her astonishment mastering for once her indolence, and inducing her to speak not merely rapidly, but loudly; "but you don't mean to say you brought me from Craigmaver to *live* here?"

"I had certainly no intention of bringing you from Craigmaver to *die* here," responded her brother somewhat pettishly; "but, if such be your

desire, pray consult your own inclinations on the subject; I have no wish to fetter them in anyway: and Mr. Merapie, having delivered himself of this obliging permission, arose, and taking up a sort of vantage position on the hearth rug, prepared himself to "go through" the remainder of the interview with what patience he might.

Mrs. Frazer, upon hearing the above reply, burst into a passion of tears, and buried her head in the sofa pillow: "It would have been well for her had she died at the same time as her poor dear Allan, and been laid in the quiet grave with him; she was wretched — she was miserable — she had expected different treatment from her brother; but all men were alike—heartless—unfeeling—selfish. Still the laird of Craigmaver would never have so wantonly lacerated her heart. *He* offered her a beautiful house, and servants, and everything; but she had said, she would go to her brother, and this was the result of it: to be brought to a low, horrid locality, into a dingy dirty house, the very name and sight of which had, in addition to the fatigue of their hurried journey, made her own maid so ill, that she was unable to rise and attend to her mistress; who consequently was thrown, for even sugarless supplies of coffee, upon the mercies of one of the most hideous

and dreadful amongst old women: brought to a place like this, and when, after having patiently borne all, she suggested the propriety of seeking another home, she was cruelly told, 'that if she could not live there, she might die.'"

From that species of dais whence the gentlemen of England love to deliver the law unto their wives and children, the merchant gazed,—first at the dull November sky, then at his sister, finally around the room. Calmly as he might have waited for the termination of an April shower, no portion of which was falling upon his head, did he watch till Mrs. Frazer's indignant feelings should have subsided, or at least till there should come a lull; and, when the sobs became less frequent, and the lamentations and reproaches grew neither so doleful nor vehement, in a voice of quiet decision he said—

"I never thought Eliza, you were especially overburdened with sense, and now I am sure of it. It is one of those things, indeed, which no lapse of time, or change of place, or afflictions, or teaching, can implant in the character of any individual, and therefore I was intensely foolish to expect you to have acquired it with the lapse of years and a great misfortune. Had I not understood from your letters that you most earnestly desired to leave Scotland, I never

should have dreamed of asking you here: but now, as you are here; as the only home I can offer you does not appear to satisfy you; as you cannot come down to your position; and as you will not understand that I, though rich, and willing and anxious to render you and yours happy, am neither a millionaire, nor your over indulgent father, the next best thing I can think of is, to allow you an income of—say one hundred pounds per annum, and pay for the education of your children at some good school. If you consider an arrangement of this kind would prove more conducive to your comfort and well-being than our present one, I am willing to pay over the first instalment to-morrow: I like people to be happy in their way, providing that way does not throw me altogether out of mine."

Here was a come down! a miserable awakening from dreams of Berkeley Square, endless upholsterer's bills, amber-colored curtains, luxurious furniture, a carriage, possibly, servants certainly, money *ad libitum;* and an awful reality of an alternative offered between Belerma Square and shabby genteel lodgings, and a ridiculous income of one hundred per annum;—twenty-five pounds per quarter, not quite two per week.

"I could not think of such a proposition," began

the bewildered lady; but John Merapie, cutting it short with an emphatic "You had better reflect upon it," left her to her own meditations.

Unsatisfactory enough they assuredly proved, but time and hope poured, as they generally do, a sort of balm into her cup of bitterness; and, by almost imperceptible degrees, the lady arrived at the pleasant conclusion that men are not invulnerable. Even Achilles, of whom she remembered once to have heard something, had one susceptible spot: and, if Achilles, why not John Merapie.

Perhaps she had been too abrupt; had not flattered him sufficiently, had seemed to desire too much. She would appear to give in,—would actually do so for the present; and probably in time he might be led to adopt her views and agree to her wishes. At all events, leave his house, quarrel with him, lose the chance of his making Malcolm his heir, she would not; in brief, ere two hours had elapsed, Mrs. Frazer had once again arrived at the conclusion that she could induce her brother to do anything, if she only took the proper plan with—and managed him.

But, unhappily, to quote Moore's simile, "hope" proved in this instance, as it generally does, "like the bird in the story," and accordingly lured the lady,

with its brilliant plumage, on into perfect labyrinth of imagination, from whence, when rudely told she was on the wrong path, she had to flounder back to the safe, though uninviting, ground of fact, with what celerity she might. She had formed her ideas of the lords of the creation in general from her minute juvenile observation of her worthy papa, who was so excessively kind and sensible that, if she only cried long enough for anything, she got it: she considered it was their duty to make money as they could, and give it unhesitatingly to women, to spend as they liked. Captain Frazer had been in her former opinion, a sort of tyrannical, obstinate wonder, an exception to every rule, unlike any other man in the world; but ere long Mr. John Merapie taught her there was another being in creation, besides Allan Frazer, who not merely liked to have his own way, but would have it: upon whom tears had less effect than on sticks and stones; whom flattery could not reach, or persuasion turn, or anger move, or vague feminine hints and threats intimidate.

"He and Allan might have been brothers," she frequently sighed, "they are so alike;" and in some points, perhaps, they did resemble each other; only, where the English merchant said plumply, fairly, and straightforwardly, "I will not, so there is no

use in wasting further tears or arguments upon the matter," the Scotch officer had been wont to remark—"Of course, my dear, it grieves me to see you weep, but as your wishes are impracticable, it is not in my power to comply with them." The one frequently implied a refusal—the other always gave it point blank; the real point of resemblance between the two, was a perfectly genuine, sincere, and settled resolution never, under any circumstances, to say "Yes" to any proposition to which they had ever felt inclined to answer "No." And as John Merapie would as soon have dreamt of putting his hand into the fire, as of making himself and his sister fashionable West End people; as all he cared for in life, was to get through it quietly, and to invite a few steady-going city men, with bald heads and grey whiskers, at certain intervals to eat roast beef and drink port wine with him, which invitation they had not the smallest objection to accept and to reciprocate; as Belerma Square suited him as well, or better, for a residence, than any other place in London; and, as in brief, he had firmly resolved not to leave it; his widowed sister soon discovered, that she was but wasting time in seeking to melt adamant: wherefore, with many sighs and groans, she swallowed her disappointment, and scattered her

visions to the four winds of heaven, with what complacence was possible under the circumstances; and moved about the house with the air and manner of a suffering saint, who, if not too good for this world, was a million times too genteel and ladylike for the society and locality into which she was thrown: and her brother went in an omnibus every morning, away into mysterious regions, lying on the Tower side of London Bridge, regions commanding water and street and warehouse views, where he made any amount of money; and whence he returned each evening, at about six o'clock, once again *viâ* omnibus to the Square, in which his sister was "buried alive"—to borrow one of her own figurative expressions—and where he owned three houses, two of which, to his no small chagrin, lacked tenants.

Thus Mrs. Frazer was conquered; she had to submit,—there was no alternative for it; and thus, so far as she was concerned, he triumphed: but ere long, the worthy merchant discovered there was nothing on earth so difficult to tame or manage as a child, and that of all children, Mina was the hardest to deal with; insomuch as that, no matter what she did, he found it impossible to be seriously angry with her, in addition to which, Mina's will being

considerably stronger than her uncle's, whenever his inclinations and hers chanced to clash, he invariably had to give up, after having held out just long enough to teach the little girl her power.

And as it chanced that, upon the very first time of her being sent, not to a select seminary, as her mother had planned, before quitting the Highlands, should be the case, but to a somewhat large day-school,—chosen by Mr. Merapie, perhaps for no better motive than because the principal thereof wore calico dresses, and persisted, for a reason known to herself and a few intimate friends, in teaching her pupils solely useful things, or rather, things which she called useful, but which were not actually so. Mina, when asked by her *gouvernante* a very absurd question, that might puzzle wiser heads than her's to answer, viz: "Which is the finest country in the world?" replied, without a moment's hesitation, "Scotland;" and in spite of explanation, entreaty, threats, and punishment, adhered so obstinately to her text, adding thereto, first, that her uncle was the best man in it, and secondly, that London was the worst place in the universe, and that she hated it, and wished she might go back to Craigmaver—that she did; that the superintendent, who had a perfect horror of Scotland and the Scotch, and

dreaded, moreover, the effect such an example might have on the other pupils, requested her assistant, Miss Caldera, to put on her bonnet, take Miss Frazer home, and report the matter to the authorities in that quarter. Upon receipt of which order, Miss Caldera, one of the most patient amongst teachers, sorrowfully holding the little rebel by the hand, set forth upon a mission that she had much rather have left unaccomplished.

There had been a hope of pardon held out to Mina, if at any stage of her journey towards Belerma Square, she repented, and would return meekly into the school-room, and say to the superintendent, in the presence of all the children, "England is the finest country in the world, and I am very sorry ma'am, and hope you will forgive me for being so naughty;" but, at the bare suggestion, the concentrated Highland blood of the whole Frazer clan rushed indignantly into the child's cheeks, and she said so many evil things about England and the English, all of which, I regret to add, she had heard from the lips of Colin Saunders, that the schoolmistress, in very horror, banged the hall door behind the refractory importation from the "Land of the Leal," as she might have closed the gates of Paradise upon a hardened, hopeless, sinner.

"Are not you sorry, dear?" asked Miss Caldera, after they had proceeded in silence for some distance.

"No, I am not," was the prompt reply; "I'd say it again, if she asked me again, and if she didn't I'd think it."

"What will your dear mamma say to you?" enquired the lady.

"Nothing," responded Mina.

"Why, won't she be angry?" demanded Miss Caldera, rapidly jumping to the conclusion that, if she would not, the mystery of her daughter's stubbornness explained itself; "won't she be angry?"

"Perhaps she may, indeed I'm sure she will, but I don't care," replied her charge valiantly.

"Not care about your mamma being angry? oh! fie!" said the governess, becoming more mystified than ever; in answer to which she received a determined "No," into which Mina somehow contrived to fling a tone, implying that the anger of the whole world signified very little unto her.

There was a pause, and then Miss Caldera, in a soothing voice, began:

"Now should you not like to come back with me like a good little girl, and—"

"No, I shouldn't;" interrupted Mina, "and

what's more, I wouldn't; I'll never go back to school again as long as I live, for that ugly old woman struck me, and I never was struck by anybody in my life before; papa never allowed me to be struck —oh! I wish my own dear papa was here now."— Whether the mention of his name carried her away from the place where she stood, or whether a sudden rush of old griefs caused her to forget she was in a veritable London street, one thing is indisputable—that, at the conclusion of the above sentence, she burst into such a perfect agony of tears, that Miss Caldera, utterly shocked and confounded, stood mutely regarding her, whilst Mina sobbed and cried to her heart's content.

"What is the matter?" demanded one of two gentlemen, who chanced to be passing; "is the child hurt?"

"Only naughty, I fear," responded Miss Caldera, against which assertion, Mina forthwith entered an indignant protest.

"I am not, but I want my papa, and he's dead; and I wanted to stay in Scotland and they would not let me."

"Good gracious! why it is Mina Frazer, Mr. Merapie's niece," exclaimed the companion of him who had first spoken; upon making which discovery,

Mr. Alfred Westwood, for he it was, turned and walked with Miss Caldera and her charge, to the door of his principal's house in the "Square;" and, having thus obtained full particulars, he took an opportunity of recounting the whole history to Mr. Merapie, ere that gentlemen returned home, and heard a rather exaggerated report thereof from the lips of his sister.

"What shall I do with her, poor little thing?" asked Mr. Merapie of his clerk, who had latterly become, in some sort, his confidential adviser; "she is more trouble to me than the whole of my business. I never felt so sorry for, and anxious about, a human being before. I wish from my soul her mother had left her at Craigmaver, as old Mr. Frazer wanted her to do. From their cradles to their graves women are sources of perpetual annoyance."

Mr. Westwood laughed, and so, in spite of his perplexity, did Mr. Merapie, but the next moment added,

"Aye! but indeed the matter is beyond a jest, for there is no one at home fit to manage her, and Mrs. Frazer will not let her go to Scotland; and, if she have determined not to return to school, why, I cannot make her, that is all."

"I can manage her; she does whatever I ask her," remarked Mr. Westwood.

"Indeed!" ejaculated the merchant, fixing a glance of incredulous wonder on the speaker; "and how the deuce do you proceed? it would be a secret worth knowing."

"Why you see," returned his *employé*, "I let her talk as much as she likes about 'home,' as she calls that heathenish Highland place, and never contradict her, no matter what she says; and tell her I have been in Scotland myself: all of which makes her so wonderfully tractable, that if I say, 'Will you not do so and so for me?' she answers, 'Yes,' instanter."

"Oh! that's it, is it?" remarked Mr. Merapie with a dissatisfied air, as if he were as far off his end as ever, "but does not she bore you to death; she would talk for hours about that confounded Glenfiord, and an old Calvinistic gardener who has inducted her into some wonderful theological mysteries; do you not get very tired of her? I feel fond enough of the child, and am, moreover, her uncle,—but still *I* do, often."

"Frank, at all events," thought the clerk; then answered aloud, "No; I never weary of anything when I have any object, no matter how trifling, in

view; and, besides, you know I am fond of children, which you, sir, I believe, are not."

"No, no, I am fond of nothing but business. I understand how to keep books and make money tolerably well; but as for ever comprehending human nature, and more especially that portion of it called woman's nature, I give up the study as hopeless."

"I was not aware you had ever commenced it," said Mr. Westwood simply, whereupon Mr. Merapie quickly demanded,

"But what am I to do with this niece of mine? That is the present question; for back to school I think she would scarcely go for her father, even if he were now alive, and there is no use asking her mother anything about it."

"Mrs. Frazer wishes her to go to a fashionable boarding-school, does she not?" enquired Mr. Westwood.

"Yes," responded his principal, "but I have resolved she shall not go."

"Well, then, the only other plan I can suggest is, that you have a visiting governess for her; a person like this Miss Caldera, for instance: an amiable sensible woman might make almost what she chose of your niece. That lady told

me, to-day, she felt sure much might be done with her."

Which simple plan never having previously entered the brain of the worthy but puzzled merchant, he caught at it instantly, and cordially thanking Mr. Westwood for his suggestion, informed him he was the most useful fellow in the world, and that he really did not know what he should do without him. In reply to which, Mr. Westwood smiled in his blandest manner, mentally adding thereto the words, "I believe you."

And Mr. Westwood took an early opportunity of informing Mrs. Frazer how he had spoken to Mr. Merapie concerning sending her daughter to a boarding-school, to which idea he found him so decidedly opposed, that merely as a *pis aller* he had suggested the propriety of having some sort of governess for her.

"Of course, my dear madam," he continued in an impressive manner, "nothing short of an aristocratical school could render her *all* you wish, but (you understand me, I am speaking in strict confidence to you,) my excellent principal—as worthy and kind-hearted a man as ever existed—has some peculiarities (we are all a little eccentric, you know), and his aversion to what you and I should call genteel,

agreeable society is so insurmountable, that I found it perfectly useless to contend further. The plan proposed is, at all events, better than having her thrown among common acquaintances, as she would have been at that day-school, where she made her first appearance and her final exit within the space of about three hours or so: was that not it?"

Mrs. Frazer believed he was correct, and assured him she considered he was one of the kindest, truest, most sensible of friends; but that, as regarded her brother, he was hopeless; and, in reference to Mina, the least said the better; it was a painful topic: for years she had proved the greatest trial ever experienced by mortal;—and Mrs. Frazer wept, and Mr. Westwood condoled and consoled; and the relict of Captain Frazer considered he was a most agreeable person, and hoped her brother would soon take him into partnership: and perhaps, in course of time, if he had promised her a house at the West End and a carriage, she might have done so too. But whatever Mr. Westwood's views might be, they certainly appeared anti-matrimonial: all he apparently desired was to keep on good terms with every member of his principal's family, from the head thereof, John Merapie, to wit, down to little Mina,—Mrs. Frazer and Malcolm of course inclusive.

CHAPTER VIII.

TREATS OF MANY THINGS.

Acting upon the suggestion his invaluable clerk had thrown out, Mr. Merapie inquired of Mina whether she would let Miss Caldera teach her at home, and receiving, after some hesitation, a conditional answer in the affirmative, he proceeded to that lady and demanded if she would be willing to instruct his niece.

Poor Miss Caldera would have jumped at the proposition of taming even a cannibal, had a few pounds been promised as the result of her efforts; for she was poor — poorer even than the church mouse alluded to in the old saw, inasmuch as that little animal enjoys comparative freedom, a thing the governess had never known for years, excepting perhaps occasionally in dreams.

She was the daughter of a country clergyman; had been brought up in a pretty village rectory;

had been educated solidly, but not inducted into the mysteries of any of those lighter accomplishments generally deemed so essential to young ladies. She was learned in Latin, had dabbled in Greek, knew a little of German, and was mistress of French and Italian; had studied mathematics till somehow she grew herself like a problem in Euclid, full of harsh unbending lines and angles; algebra, to her, presented no more difficulties than the rule-of-three; and as for the derivation of words, only let any person ask the meaning of one, and she poured down upon the devoted head of the questioner hosts of Latin and Greek direct ancestors, with collateral Gallic and old Saxon relatives, thick as dust from the backs of antique black letter volumes which almost suffocated him. And whilst her father thus crammed her with useless learning, her mother instructed her in some more needful and feminine arts—to wit, the making of pies, and concocting of puddings, and stitching of shirts, and mending of stockings. And, if nature had not bestowed upon her a kind heart, a placid temper, and a love of the beautiful so intense as to be almost painful, she would have been in reality as in appearance, as crisp, and short, and good, as one of her own pie crusts, which had been perhaps a little overdone in the ovening; but she was possessed

of, and retained, in spite of circumstances, a fondness for flowers, and poetry, and quiet scenery, which added still a bitter drop unto a cup which time and change and death and misfortune soon made bitter enough.

Parents died, money was lost, friends grew cold, relatives careless, all save one—the strong minded schoolmistress previously referred to, who, hearing that her cousin, the rector's daughter, was in absolute want and could not get a situation, wrote to ask her up to town, to the end that she might assist in her matter of fact seminary and receive no remuneration.

She supported her; and Miss Caldera, after school hours, occasionally obtaining a French or Italian tuition, contrived by dint of economy and patching, to clothe herself, and sometimes, purchase a new book and a bunch of flowers: the two latter were all her luxuries. Toiling, pinching, saving, she could make no more than kept her from the parish, and enabled her to buy, at rare intervals, a volume of poetry and a few half-faded lilies. And this was she who once had affectionate parents, pleasant acquaintances, a cheerful home; whose birth had been welcomed with smiles, whose mother had thanked God because a daughter was given unto her, who once

had been admired,—loved perhaps: this was she. Wonderful are the ways of this world, and of the people in it; but most wonderful of all things unto me seems the mode in which assistance and pity, and sympathy and affection, are accorded,—frequently gratuitously and unnecessarily to the young and to the pretty, the *almost* happy and the wealthy; whilst those, on whose faces care has set its unmistakeable mark,—whose feet are weary with the toilsome journey of years, who require a double portion of kindness, friendship, and happiness, to console them for the misery of the past,—are permitted to pass solitary on their way, unquestioned, unheeded, unloved.

Miss Caldera's cousin—a bustling, determined, energetic woman—declared she was a good enough creature, but a great oddity; and the governess who, though she would have liked her own way as well as any body living, never got it, subsided in the course of years, into a silent, reserved, angular old maid, who never opened her heart unto mortal, and never spoke energetically on any subject unless she were exhorting a child to be good, or a girl to marry; and who was thought to be just fit for her position.

And oh! how she detested that position, how uselessly she had striven to master fate a little, and

better her condition, she knew; and how, at night, when she laid down to rest, sick and dispirited, the tears trickled down her cheeks as she thought of her old home, and her dead parents; her past, and her present,—the cold moonbeams that fell upon her face alone took cognizance.

Had any one told any of her London acquaintances, that Mary Caldera wept in secret, because, at thirty-two, she was an orphan and a dependant, the thing would have been first discredited, and then laughed at; but people will not even smile at my recording the fact here, as it is the custom to extend compassion to individuals where it can do them no good, viz., in books; and to withhold the same where it might prove beneficial, to wit, in actual life.

And though Miss Caldera had a kind true heart, and was, moreover, only two and thirty, her pupils, even those who liked her best, persisted in calling her a plain, strange old maid; and she cared very little for anybody on earth, and nobody in the world really cared one straw for her.

Such, then, was the individual who was selected to instruct Mina Frazer for two hours per diem, and to bring the rebellious Scotch child up "in the way she should go." Her cousin, indeed, to whom, of course, no profit was to accrue from the arrange-

ment, and who entertained a sort of horror of the "first pupil who had ever mastered her," and whom in consequence she had summarily dismissed home, "hoping that the ruling powers there would send her back penitent and acquiescent;" seriously advised Miss Caldera to have nothing to do with the obstinate, over-indulged, deceitful looking little creature, who had promised to be so easily managed, and who turned out such a miniature virago. "But the governess had a vague faith in Mina, and moreover wanted the money; for both of which reasons she undertook the task of teaching the child, so far as in her lay, the lore of books, the love of man, and the fear of God."

What other persons disliked in Mina, viz., her perpetual allusions to her father, and her ceaseless regret for her native land and the friends who dwelt there, proved a sort of link of communication betwixt the girl and the woman; between her whose future was yet unrevealed to mortal ken, and her whose lot was, to all human appearance, cast, and settled for ever; between the child of the Scotch officer and the daughter of the village rector. For years, it is true, they never exactly understood each other; for the dry formal manner acquired during a kind of eternity of tuition, cannot be cast aside at

once; and Mina never could comprehend any one being *very* fond of her who did not say so; but still, after a time, they got on remarkably well together; and so did the little girl with her lessons.

At the first she rebelled considerably, having a dim idea that Miss Caldera had been in some way accessary to the insults and injuries heaped upon her Highland head upon the occasion of her first and only visit to Mrs. Meredith's establishment for young ladies; but Miss Caldera, having an intuitive feeling that her charge might be subdued by kindness, said so calmly, "You would not wish to make me unhappy I *know*;" that Mina, quite astonished at this view of the question, answered, "She would not;" and, therefore, did what she was told, as quietly as if she had been brought up under the iron rule of "discipline."

Still there was always, even in her best moments, something so unsettled, dissatisfied, and melancholy about the pupil, that the soul of the governess was frequently disturbed about her. "I do not quite understand her," she generally thought: "I wonder if her father, who was so fond of her, did; and dear me! how fond I am growing of the child too."

But whether loved in England or not; whether

new friends liked or disliked, praised or blamed, it seemed much the same to Mina: her heart like that of Campbell was in the Highlands; it stuck there tenaciously, let her body be where it might. She had been transplanted somewhat rudely to English ground, and though she lived there, she never for years and years took root in, or looked kindly on, the soil.

The country of old—the looks of old—the friends of old, were to the young child what they frequently do not prove even to much older people—things to be remembered and grieved over, not for a day, but for years: never to be forgotten till Mina Frazer should have forgotten her own identity too, and passed from the sight of heather and roses for ever.

Colin Saunders had done her merely justice when he affirmed so vehemently, on the morning of her departure, that "she would not forget even a daisy on the moors;" and when Allan, the old laird's grandson, who delighted in tormenting the gardener, remarked, as he frequently did:

"I told you, Colin, she would not remember us for more than a few days; we have not had a letter for an immense time, and your 'mull' seems to me like what Prince Charlie was, 'long o' comin,'—'"

Saunders, looking up into heaven as if to implore

it to corroborate the truth of his assertion, would respond—

"If I never heard tell of her; if I never saw her; if there never was word from her again; I would know her heart was wi' us a'—the places and the people she cared so much for: the child of my dear old master never could but care for the land he 'lo'ed sae weel.'"

"But my cousin, Malcolm, is the son of Captain Frazer, too; and —"

"Ay! but Miss Mina strained after her father's side of the house; and he, got from his mother the English nature that cares not so much for country or clan, as for gold, and ease, and comfort, and the things o' this wicked world."

"I am sure our neighbours would be flattered by your opinion of them, Colin."

"Flattered or no', it's nae concern o' mine," retorted the man warmly; "I'd say it to their king if he were standing where you are now,—that no people in the world cares so much for home when they're in it, or pines as much for it when absent, as the true old Highlanders that fought so nobly for their own prince,—fought, and fell, and died for him: ay! and would do it again, if need were."

"Hush! hush!" cried Allen, laughing, "or

although the Jacobite days are over, I shall have to report you to our friend the sheriff."

"I said, Master Allan, I would speak it to the king, and I don't mind telling it to the sheriff; it's not treason but truth; the minister says it is so; and if he says it ——"

"I may swear it," supplied the laird's grandson; "and does he assert also that Mina will not forget us?"

"I never heard him speak of her, in regard of that," responded the gardener; "but I assert it Master Allan, and if she does not send the 'mull' to me, I know she wants to send it, which is just the same."

Colin was quite correct, as the subsequent advent of his snuff box proved, the sole cause of the delay having arisen from the fact that even in London things cannot be purchased without money, of which valuable commodity, when Mina made her generous proposal, she was lamentably in want. But a present from her uncle, who discovered in course of time, perhaps through the medium of Mr. Westwood, the desire of his niece's heart, at length enabling her to fulfil her promise, she dispatched to Craigmaver the very ugliest snuff box eye of mortal ever lighted on. She thought it beautiful, however, and so did

Colin Saunders, who regularly carried it to "Kirk" with him, though he would have died rather than have taken a pinch out of it in the sacred edifice; and when the old man, long long afterwards, closed his eyes on earth's pleasures and sorrows for ever, that snuff box was found, preserved as a precious relic, beside the two other treasures of his life — his mother's Bible and his father's spectacles.

And that wonderful chariot of time, pursuing its ceaseless course just the same along the London streets as over the Scottish moors, gradually added some inches to Mina Frazer's height; gave a different expression to her face, and by an imperceptible, inexplicable—and, if not noted day by day, almost alarming—process, transformed Mina Frazer from a child into something bordering upon, if not quite, a young lady.

But time, rarely, as we know, missing an opportunity of altering aught upon which it is possible for him to lay either a beautifying or a withering finger, had effected other changes besides that of making Mina older; he had sent Malcolm, as a midshipman, into the navy; brought a tenant to one of Mr. Merapie's houses; and, almost immediately after Mrs. Frazer's arrival in the mansion the merchant had chosen for his own abode, installed Miss Has-

well as efficient housekeeper, in lieu of Mrs. Coleford, abdicated.

For these events, of course, there were a multitude of reasons; but, not to be tedious, suffice it to say that in reference to Malcolm, Mr. Merapie had wished the boy to enter his counting-house; which idea was strongly opposed by Mrs. Frazer, by her son, and finally, by Mr. Westwood, as he *said*, in consequence of their strong objections to the project.

"Let him take his own way for a while," he said; "and he will then either quietly settle down to business, or else stick to the profession he has chosen for himself. If you *force* him now to the desk, he will never become either a clever merchant or a brave officer; give him his wish and you will speedily see whether it be not a mere boyish fancy: theoretically liking the navy is one thing, and practical knowledge of it another; let him eat of the fruit and find if it be most sweet or most bitter." And, as usual, Mr. Merapie followed his clerk's advice; nothing loth, if the truth must be told; for Englishmen in general, albeit ours is not a military nation, are by no means averse to talk of "my nephew, the captain," serving his country either by land or by water: wherefore he speedily fitted Malcolm out for sea, and, as if the one step were the natural conse-

quence of the other, almost immediately afterwards took, as Mrs. Frazer had often wished he would, his clever clerk Mr. Alfred Westwood, into partnership.

And, as "one event makes many," this new business arrangement brought, in the person of that gentleman, a tenant into one of Mr. Merapie's dreary mansions; for, with clerkship, Mr. Westwood discarded lodgings, and commenced that wretched trade called "housekeeping," on his own account. Thus it naturally came to pass that many, or rather most of his evenings, were spent in the drawing-room of his senior partner, conversing with his sister; and, when Miss Caldera was there, insinuating himself into her good graces, and endeavouring to regain, what somehow he had lately lost, his power over Mina — whose reserve, and strangeness, and eccentricity, her mother said, increased every day; but, latterly, Mrs. Frazer, after this mournful declaration, was in the habit of adding: "And it is such a pity, for every one says she is such a clever creature;" appealing to Mr. Westwood for confirmation of this opinion,—which confirmation, he gave in a manner that made Mina feel desperately angry whenever she chanced to be in the room whilst he was delivering his complimentary impression of her.

And Mr. Westwood had not the most remote intention of marrying Mrs. Frazer, as Mr. Merapie had once expected he would: to be sure, the advisability of such a course had once presented itself to him, and he had argued the matter in his own mind —as the newspapers say about lawyers—with considerable ability and much clearness on both sides, but he finally shook his head and said "no."

"What would fifty pounds a year do towards maintaining her and her children, and I can get a partnership without marrying for it; and it is not by any means likely John Merapie would both give me a share of the profits and portion his sister. No, no! I won't marry her at any rate."

But it very soon occurred to the busy and practical imagination of Alfred Westwood, that, though John Merapie might not "give him a share of the profits and portion his sister," yet he most probably would "give him a share of the profits and portion his niece." And he then began to consider what an uncommonly nice little creature that niece was—quite pretty enough to fall in love with; quite clever enough, though by no means accomplished, to adorn his West End home—when he got it—and, therefore, before the partnership was even spoken of, he made up his mind that, sometime or other, he would

marry Mina Frazer, her consent to such an arrangement being taken by the worthy clerk as quite a matter of course.

"She liked me when she was a child, and continues to do so; at least, I do not see why she should not," he reasoned; "her uncle will give her a large fortune, and it will all suit admirably." Acting upon which conclusion he began to make himself "particularly agreeable" to Mina, who, strange to say, seemed so wonderfully insensible to his fascinations that, finally, Mr. Westwood grew quite provoked, and resolved, as he expressed it, just "to see how matters really stood."

And, accordingly, chancing on his way up to the drawing-room one evening to encounter her, the *ci-devant* clerk abruptly demanded—

"Oh! Mina, I have been intending to ask you something for a long time: should you have any objection to marry me?"

"The greatest objection possible," she briefly returned. Whereupon he laughed as if it were a capital jest; but Mina knew it was not so on his side; and he, clearly understanding her words were spoken in solemn earnest, felt angry and irritated accordingly.

CHAPTER IX.

ADVANCES THE STORY BUT LITTLE.

Mr. John Merapie never got any coat-of-arms, or crest, or motto, or anything from the Herald's office, because he averred "he hated humbug;" but in lieu of the above aristocratical "absurdities," as he termed them, he took for his text the three words just mentioned, and not merely preached but acted upon them perpetually.

He was in the main, not only a kind but a just man; most respected him, many grew to like him; but he said he did not profess to be capable of "loving particularly," and we all know that, when people do not "love particularly," they seldom are loved "especially."

Mr. Westwood believed his principal was as fond of Mina as it was possible for him to be of mortal being, and assuredly he treated her with a some-

thing as nearly approaching tenderness as he ever exhibited, or ever had exhibited to any one.

When in a peculiarly happy temper, he called her, "My little niece," or, "Mina, my dear;" he liked to see her handsomely dressed; he was most liberal in money matters towards the trio generally; but perhaps, though Malcolm made the heaviest claims on his purse, his heart really went more with the presents he occasionally gave to Mina. He thought her a model of prudence, and cleverness, and sense: most probably because she spoke little, could make pies and puddings, do all sorts of needle work, understood Latin, a little Greek, French, and Italian; was learned in Euclid, and competent to find an answer to any algebraic supposition without the key to the same being given unto her: finally, she was economical; did not care for visiting, never murmured in his presence about anything, was innocent as a Hottentot of accomplishments, and had an affection for no "frippery," save flowers.

Here was a perfect woman; one after John Merapie's own heart, who could not play, or dance, or draw flowers, or nett (crochet was not then in vogue), or braid, or do anything more sinful than sing in a strange low voice ballads old as the hills,

and almost as beautiful,—and work a pair of slippers for her uncle or Malcolm occasionally. He had superintended her education himself,—that is, he had made up his mind what she should learn, and she had learnt it; and in what she should not be instructed, and of course that was left alone; and here was the result—a girl with no nonsense, or affectation, or humbug about her. "Mina," her uncle said, "was solid like one of his houses in Belerma Square, which would last for a hundred years or more.

"It is earnestly to be hoped she will not do that," remarked Miss Caldera, who had a sort of humour, not witty, but dry; whereupon Mr. Merapie responded,

"Her mind would, though her body might not; I am satisfied her faculties will never desert her, she has been properly educated, Miss Caldera, and she may thank you and me for it."

Miss Caldera had very quiet doubts as to whether thankfulness was a strongly developed trait in the character of her emancipated charge; indeed Mina, who talked freely and perpetually to her, frankly said,

"She thought she had little to be especially thankful for, as she had many things she did not

want, and very few that she did." And, in truth, her position was neither a cheering nor a natural one :—a young girl pent up from year to year in a dreary house in Belerma Square, surrounded by old persons; ceaselessly longing for a glimpse of her former home; her mind growing morbid and almost contracted for want of society, light, air, sunshine, freedom; no music, no companions, no paintings, nothing lively to hear or see, nothing to think of but stern reality, unless she pondered on the beauty of that land which had stamped its vision of loveliness on her soul for ever; no fixed employment, no pleasant conversation, for no one visited at her uncle's, save a few staid city merchants and Alfred Westwood, to whom she now never spoke, if she could help it. Her mother's society was not particularly agreeable, as she did little but bemoan her fate and wonder when Malcolm would write, and why Mina was so odd. "I should die," said the latter to Miss Caldera, "if it were not for you."

And it was true, they had a strange sort of attachment for each other—the weary girl and the world-tired woman. The governess was perpetually rebuking her pupil, and the pupil was in the habit of retorting rather sharply; but there was enough genuine love between them to have put half-a-dozen

so-called friendships to shame, to have withstood the lapse of time, and breath of calumny, and hand of change, and test of separation.

Mina's temper was not of the meekest, her mood of the serenest; and frequently the governess told her so, and the girl, by way of rejoinder, said Miss Caldera never felt for, nor had the least sympathy with her: still the tie, whatever it was, which joined the two hearts, somehow bore these perpetual jerks without even a thought of breaking; and, at sixteen, Mina Frazer was far fonder of her quaint instructress than she had been as a child, and when the bond of teacher and taught ceased to unite them, that of friend and friend proved quite as strong to draw them almost daily together. But still a perpetual difference of opinion caused a sort of ceaseless war to range between them: they never met without a kind of tilt, for whatever Miss Caldera's private idea might be, her generally expressed one was that Mina was the most fortunate creature in the universe, who would only come to a knowledge of the blessings she enjoyed, if by any mischance she were at a future period deprived of them.

She considered Mina too much inclined to self pity to indulge her with even an atom of compassion on any subject: she conscientiously talked to

her in a general way, sensibly and rationally enough; but the sense and reasoning coming from the mind, and not from her heart, they usually sounded dry, and cold, and formal; and annoyed Mina into making sundry irritable answers, which bettered her cause not in the least, and confirmed Miss Caldera in her opinion that the girl ought not to be encouraged to murmur by any unwise sympathy or words of commiseration.

Thus, whenever Mina was inclined to yearn a little for a sight of the land of her birth, and the relatives who dwelt there, the *gouvernante* treated her to that very questionable kind of consolation derivable from considering that some other person had no friends at all, no home, no money, and no advantages. Mina, who perhaps in her heart never greatly desired society, occasionally suggested that something of the kind would be suitable to her years, and agreeable to her character; whereupon Miss Caldera remarked, she "ought to be thankful she had so kind an uncle, so amiable a brother, and a mother who —"

"What?" demanded the girl once, as her friend paused.

"Never interferes with, and thinks you so clever," was the somewhat embarrassed response.

Then, again, Mina frequently expressed an opinion to the effect that Belerma Square was not the very pleasantest locality in London, or her uncle's house the most cheerful residence in that city; and so surely as she did so, Miss Caldera promptly informed her she might be much worse off,—might be forced to live in some dreadful neighbourhood, and that it was the height of ingratitude to be repining about such a trifle, when she was surrounded by luxuries and blessings innumerable.

"Well, suppose," said Mina, one afternoon, in answer to some such comment as the above,—resting both elbows on a little square table in the room where she had been wont in former days to inquire into the mysteries of other tongues, but where, latterly, she came merely to give free scope to her own,—resting both elbows on the table, and supporting her chin with the backs of her hands in a most unfashionable, discontented, and unladylike manner,—"Well, suppose we just see what those luxuries and blessings are, concerning which you are eternally talking. I admit that my uncle is most kind; that Malcolm, when at home, is amiable; that my mother never speaks to me except to say I am clever and odd; that Belerma Square is not Smithfield; that this house is not a five-roomed

cottage; and that in every way I might be, as you perpetually say, 'much worse off.' I have shelter, food, and clothing; am, in short, 'provided for,' without being compelled to do anything for myself. If I want money my uncle gives it to me: I admit I have all these causes, as you remark, for thankfulness; and yet ——"

"You are dissatisfied," promptly interposed Miss Caldera.

"Not absolutely dissatisfied," returned Mina. "I was going to add—and yet I wish for something more: but whenever I express a desire for aught further than I now possess, you appear to imagine I am discontented and ungrateful. Happy here, I tell you candidly, I have never been: no time has reconciled me to this place: no circumstances have here occurred to make me cordially like it: I do not value the 'luxuries and blessings' you speak of so highly as many might, simply because food, dress, and money, are not to my mind the things a human being should prize the most in existence."

"You could not do without any one of them at all events," drily remarked Miss Caldera.

"Only try me," returned Mina with eagerness; "only say to me, Which will you do,—remain in

Belerma Square and retain all you now possess, or live on the humblest fare, and dress in the simplest manner at Craigmaver? and you shall see how speedily I will choose the latter. Oh, dear friend! you have never been in my country; you have never seen anything like it, I know: but still, try to imagine the difference between a ride over the breezy moors, and a stiff dreary walk through these suffocating London streets: think of sunrises on the hills, and noons among flowers and perfumes and scenery; of evenings on the water, with the clear moon shining above, and mountains around, and the voices of sweet singers floating over the lake, as in a dream of romance. If you had looked once, only once, at the view from Glenfiord over Loch Lomond; or stood for ten minutes on the lawn at Craigmaver; you would never marvel again that I cannot become naturalized here. How I think of those places!" she added with a sigh: "I try not, but they will return back and back to my memory,—'A thing of beauty is a *grief* for ever.' I wish, I wish, you could just get one peep of my old home; and then you would understand one of the things for which I pine."

"And do you think, Mina," said Miss Caldera,

earnestly,—a sort of half-strangled memory swelling up in her heart at the sound of the girl's regretful murmur; "that I cannot sympathize with your feelings from experience: that I never pined to revisit any place; never wished for anything? Do not believe it, for though I have not sighed for the sight of lakes, and hills, and mountains, I have wept for the loss of things more precious, in my eyes, than these can possibly be in yours—a happy home, an independence, parents, friends, enjoyment.

"After I first came to London, the perfume of a familiar flower, the words of a song, the sound of a melody, used to have power sufficient to make me feel faint and sick: but I knew then what I tell you now, that it is wrong to be discontented with the lot which hath been appointed for us—to be always looking gloomily back, thinking of what might have been: so I floated along with the frequently muddy stream, and tried with my whole soul to be thankful I was enabled to do it."

"But you were not happy," cried Mina. "I would not believe it if you said you were: you might feel resigned; you might think you were quite contented: but completely happy ——"

"Who is so, on earth, Mina?" demanded the lady.

"Oh! I do not know; plenty, I dare say;" was the response.

"Are you acquainted with any individual who can truly state that he, or she, feels so?" asked Miss Caldera.

"No;" confessed Mina: "but then you see I am acquainted with only a very few persons. If I were back at Craigmaver; if uncle John, and you, and we, all were living there, with my dear old other uncle, I should not have a thought of care,—a wish on earth ungratified."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as I can be of anything in the world, that I should feel completely happy there."

"Indeed you would not, Mina."

"And why not?" she inquired, "I was perfectly happy at Glenfiord; oh! supremely so, until papa died."

"But you were a child then; you are one no longer. You cannot return to that state again, Mina —ever——"

There was a something almost mournful in the tone in which these words were spoken; it struck sadly to the young girl's heart, and, after musing for a moment, she said—

"Then you think that nowhere—in England—in

Scotland — in this world, I shall ever be happy again?"

"Comparatively you may be; completely so, never," was the rejoinder. "*That* time comes but once in the lives of any—not at all in the lives of some: it passes away like a dream of the morning; its transitory brightness is remembered always, but never can be felt again."

"Yet I have a wish——" commenced Mina.

"To try the experiment," finished Miss Caldera; "better not—far, far better not. Keep the 'thing of beauty' as it is, not a grief, Mina, but 'a joy for ever.' Long not too much to see it again; for believe me that which we desire most frequently proves our heaviest trial when granted to our importunity."

"Then ought we to wish for nothing?" was the impatient question.

"If we could avoid it,—but human nature is rebellious."

"And do you never wish?" persisted Mina.

"Often," confessed her friend, "but still I am aware it is, to say the least, foolish and useless."

"And what is it for?" demanded her former pupil; "do tell me—I should like to know—what *you* desire."

"What I never expect to get," replied the lady

with a sad smile; "a small independence, a little cottage, no matter how humble if I could call it mine; flowers, green fields and nature about me; these are my wishes, extravagant enough, no doubt: on this side of the grave I have none other."

"I wish I were rich, and they should soon be realities," said the girl; then after a pause she added, "Do you know, if you would just always talk to me as you have talked to me now, I do not think I should ever snap at you."

"*Id est*, if I encouraged you to discontent by showing you how very far from perfect I am; if I seconded your every foolish fancy, and praised and flattered and complimented you for not being a simpleton or a dunce; you would perhaps not get out of temper quite so frequently as is the case at present," remarked Miss Caldera.

"If you would only acknowledge occasionally, that you are not perfectly satisfied and supremely happy, and cease telling me how thankful I ought to be for a whole host of things I could be quite contented without, I would never ask you to praise, or flatter, or compliment."

"For a sufficient reason," said her friend with a smile.

"And what may that be?" asked Mina.

"Because you know I would not do it."

"No," was the reply, "but because I shouldn't like you half so well, if you were in the habit of saying such things. I believe half the compliments in the world are merely civil sneers, that delight some and provoke others. Now, when my mother or uncle praise and extol me, I know they are quite sincere, though, as you imagine, perhaps not judicious; but Mr. Westwood ——"

"Well, Mina, I am all attention, what of Mr. Westwood?"

"If he ever flatter, be sure he is inwardly laughing at the folly of those who listen to him; for he really admires nothing, cares for nothing, thinks of nothing, but himself ——"

"And you," quietly added Miss Caldera.

"I do not believe he does," said Mina quickly. "I think he is the most conceited, disagreeable, selfish being in existence—I perfectly detest him."

"Times are changed," remarked the lady; "I remember when you were very fond of him."

"Yes, when I was a child, perhaps," returned Mina vehemently; "ere that time had passed away which, as you say, never can return,—before I had sense, or knowledge, or understanding,—*then* I know I did like him, but now ——"

"You do not."

"I despise him," said the girl. "I cannot endure to see him, to hear him speak, to speak to him. If there were no other reason in the world to make me wish to leave London, *he* would be quite sufficient."

"And yet he loves you. Oh! Mina."

"And yet he loves me, oh! Miss Caldera," pettishly echoed that young lady, "and what in the world do I care whether he do or not. To begin with, I believe he can love nothing but himself; and next, I think, if he entertain the slightest shadow of affection for me, it is solely because he fancies Uncle John will give me a large fortune."

"So you have got to the portion already," laughed Miss Caldera, "well, although you think so little of him, I wish from my heart it were come to that."

"I know you do," retorted Mina; "but it never shall—never. I had rather go to live in Seven Dials, upon bread and water, and learn to beg or steal, or do anything of that kind, than marry a detestable, vain, self-sufficient being, who would be continually sneering at me, and saying the most cutting things in the most polite manner."

"I should like to see you begging, Mina," said Miss Caldera; "and dear me child, how soon you would tire of the bread and water, and try to make

a little variety by boiling them up together, or exchanging your allowance for a turnip, or perhaps a carrot: and what a respectable locality you have selected for the scene of your penance. I wonder if you ever will learn to reflect, for one moment, before you speak."

"You may laugh if you like, and you may think it folly, or sense, or whatever else you choose, but I repeat it is *truth*," returned Mina, laying a vigorous emphasis on the last word. "I had rather live anywhere, or with any person, than with your prime favorite, Alfred Westwood. I cannot bear to see him even for an hour; only imagine therefore what it would be to have to admire him always."

"Your affections and your distastes are equally strong, and, I must add, Mina, equally unreasonable," was the response. "Have you a single good reason for your aversion to Mr. Westwood, because if you could tell me one, I might change my opinion on the subject."

"I have fifty good reasons that satisfy me I am right, not one of which, however, would convince you," answered Mina. "To begin with, he is the vainest——"

"Well, I admit he is a little vain," interposed Miss Caldera; "and you, Mina, are so free from the

weakness yourself, that you have a perfect right to throw the first stone!"

"No, no, I am not vain," cried the other eagerly; I *know* I am not pretty: no one but papa ever thought me so. You know I am not vain."

"Personally, perhaps not, but there are other kinds of vanity even more objectionable and dangerous: however, to return to Mr. Westwood, what is his next crime?"

"He is a hypocrite," promptly responded Mina.

"Indeed, make that out clearly to my satisfaction, and I am mute," replied Miss Caldera.

"Unless you can find it out for yourself," said Mina, "it is useless for me to attempt to prove it to you; if you had not once told me 'there are none so blind as those who won't see,' I should have said—watch him as closely as I have done; only notice him talking to mamma, and agreeing with everything she advances; listen to how he humours and cautiously flatters my poor uncle: he appears honest and straightforward to you, but he is not so, *I* know."

"How do you know?"

"He says what he does not think: he compliments me and sneers at me; and he imagines, because I am a girl, he can deceive and blind me, but he cannot."

"We have now got two of his faults settled," said Miss Caldera; "what is his third? I hope and trust you spoke, as usual, in a rather exaggerated style, when you stated you had fifty reasons; if not, it will be morning again before we get through them all: now Mina, the third!"

"He has a bad temper," she answered.

"That is unfortunate," remarked Miss Caldera, "as we know 'two of a trade cannot agree.'"

"I do wish you would forget some of those detestable old proverbs," exclaimed Mina; "they are just like yourself, dry and provoking, and express the most disagreeable ideas in the fewest number of words: I do not pretend to have a good temper, but it is better than *his*,—I am sure of that, at any rate."

"Entirely a matter of opinion," said Miss Caldera, with a smile.

"Well, we can leave it so, and I will retain mine," retorted Mina; "and, besides, nobody knows anything about who he was, or what his relations are; and there is a quarter of a century between us."

"Perhaps," was the rejoinder; "but at all events you have ancestors enough on your father's side to suffice for both: and if his relatives, supposing he have any, do not cross your path, why in the world,

child, need you step out of it to discover their's. With regard to age, I remember once merely casually remarking to you, that Mr. Awrill was an agreeable young man, and you answered, quite tartly,—'that he might be after a little while, when he grew older, and had learned to talk properly.'"

"Young, or old, he was worth a million Mr. Westwoods," said Mina; "and there are a great many on the earth a vast deal better than he, after all; but to end this discussion, I am not going to marry your friend,—not for my mother, not for my uncle, not for Malcolm, not for you."

"And pray, my dear, did anybody ever ask you to marry him?" enquired Miss Caldera.

The angry blood came mounting into Mina's face, as she answered,

"I do not know what it is makes me care for you; for I do believe of all the tormenting unaccountable beings mortal ever beheld, you are the strangest. My mother has not the most remote notion this man entertains, what you call, 'a regard for me;' nor has my uncle, at least he never said so to me; and Malcolm, I am sure, would be quite provoked about it, if he were told; but you—why you know as well as I do, that you have been praising him, and telling me how foolish I should

be to reject such affection (as if I wanted affection from him), and what an excellent husband he would make (it shall never be to me though); and a number of such things, for the last five weeks: if you never said in so many plain words, 'Mina, I wish you would marry that Adonis;' you have given me pretty clearly to understand that you desired I should do so."

"Dear me, Mina, what a deal you do say about nothing," observed her friend, when she stopped literally for want of breath; "if you would just take things a little more reasonably and quietly ——"

"But I cannot be quiet or reasonable," interrupted Mina, "when I am worried out of my life by that creature, smiling, and simpering, and sighing, and sneering, and complimenting. Will you oblige me by saying why you wish me to marry him?"

"Briefly—because I think, and am sure, you might 'go further and fare worse;'" was the reply.

"Another of those horrid saws," said Mina; "why will you annoy me with them—why will you do it, dear old friend?"

"Partly, because I know nothing could please you at this minute; chiefly, because they express my meaning much better than I could for myself."

"I wish, notwithstanding," said Mina, "that you would explain it a little more fully to me."

"Well then, Mina, I think Mr. Westwood will make you quite as good a husband as you are likely to meet with: he is kind, sufficiently rich, fond of you, very clever, agreeable, well-informed."

"Anything else?" inquired the girl, when her friend paused: "anything else?"

"No!" answered Miss Caldera, rising, "as you prohibit proverbs; let me however, suggest, that there are two, the consideration of which might be beneficial to you at present: one relates to the best time for making hay; and the other is about a word to the wise."

"Heaven grant me patience!" murmured the young lady devoutly.

"I trust it may," said Miss Caldera; "for believe me it is a virtue of which you are lamentably deficient."

To which truism Mina made no answer, but walked silently off to her embroidery frame, behind which she was in the habit of taking refuge when either annoyed by any reference to Mr. Westwood, or by his unwelcome presence; and there she would sit for hours, working generally, at an interminable pair of slippers with the rapidity of lightning;

musing and thinking and pondering—about what? no person, perhaps not even she herself, had a perfectly accurate idea.

Others in the world, however, had apparently more patience, and greater occasion for its exercise, than Mina Frazer; and, though, had any friend told her so, she most probably would have justly enough replied "that was no comfort to her," there may be some who would willingly turn from the enumeration of her slight trials, to the heavier and more hopeless troubles of the miser's eldest born.

CHAPTER X.

DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

THERE are some persons, living in agreeable town or country localities, who contend that "place" has nought to do with happiness, just as others who have never felt the want of money, gravely assert that gold is the "least good, and the greatest care in life." To disprove, however, the truth of both these ingenious theories, I apprehend it would be merely necessary to strip the one class of persons of a little superfluous gilding, and to transplant the other to a less agreeable habitation, when, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, their views, feelings, and expressions would undergo a wonderful, and not altogether desirable, alteration. It is a something really beautiful and cheering and strengthening to hear how people preach; that is, it would be so if one were not occasionally treated to a sight of how they practise. It is one of the easiest and

commonest thing in life to tell your neighbour to carry his heavy burden in silence, but one of the most difficult to bear a much lighter load without grumbling considerably yourself.

All think their own sorrows the greatest; and, considering that the music of their lament must be, or at least ought to be, quite as acceptable to others as it proves to themselves, go through the world humming it complacently; and, when another person sets up an opposition murmur, indignantly endeavour to silence him by exclaiming "Pray cease your pitiful song, listen to mine,"—never thinking he may deem his melody far more full of pathos than theirs, and that, at all events, he has quite as good a right as they to annoy every mortal in creation with the melancholy dirge which he has composed in honour of his wrongs and trials and misfortunes.

Which brings me to what I intended to advance at starting, namely, that although it is edifying to hear people talk about the duty of being contented, and saying how resignedly *they* could live anywhere —on anything; still, those who feel what others have never more than imagined, may surely be forgiven if they strive to revenge themselves on fate by repining a little at her decrees.

It were better and nobler policy, I admit, either

to bend patiently, or to rebel valiantly; but there are some who cannot exactly shape their destinies as they would, and yet who find it impossible not to fret and murmur occasionally: and it is no small aggravation of their grief to be perpetually told "you should" by those, who, were they in a similar situation, would lose no opportunity of informing the world "We are suffering saints and long-enduring martyrs;" "See ye not the terrible disasters which have befallen the 'salt of the earth;'" "Behold our misfortunes, and how we bear them." "Solely because," they might generally add, "we are compelled to do so, whether we like it or not."

There never was man of mortal mould who bore his griefs more uncomplainingly than Ernest Ivraine, or who looked more miserable upon them; there never existed any one who asked less sympathy, or received a smaller portion of it; there never was a human being who walked more silently and mournfully through life; nor in the length and breadth of England could there have been discovered an individual, who, having an equally heavy burden to bear, not for days merely, but for years, did bear it externally with such exemplary patience, and made so little noise about its weight.

"Constant dropping wears the stone," however;

and, though the hourly fall of vexatious tormenting pebbles produced apparently no ill effects on the temper of the miser's eldest born, there was—furrowed by the weary untiring stream of annoying events—a deep channel in his heart, through which sullen angry feelings and evil thoughts and many disappointments flowed always and ever ceaselessly.

Hatred and ignoble wishes are the darkest demons which can dwell in the heart of man. Affection and generous purposes are the guardian angels of the soul. And it was these most antagonistic principles that made and marred, and threatened and preserved, the peace and the well-being of Ernest Ivraine.

Hatred to his father, love to his brother; hatred to the man who blighted his life, and doled out with scanty hand the barest necessaries of existence; who, denying himself and family all those comforts and luxuries so usual in, and essential for, respectability in their station, shut the high wooden gates of "Paradise" on the world at large, and lived within the enclosure of brick walls—bounding to the east, south, north, and west, his swampy domain—a miser amongst his money bags, most utterly alone. Hatred to the man who would not die, who starved on and maintained, by some inexplicable

process, the mysterious connection between soul and body; whilst better and stronger and healthier and more useful men sickened, day by day, sunk—some slowly, some rapidly—and expired. Everywhere death journeyed; at every door he occasionally knocked, save through the morasses and at the gate of "Paradise." The old miser kept every other creditor at bay, why not the universal one? he never paid a debt he could avoid; and, when payment was inevitable, he delayed the act of justice as long as possible. Why should he, therefore, not contrive to evade for years the liquidation of that debt which compassionate nature exacts at length from every one of her weary, or grateful, or haughty, or disobedient children?

It was with a species of mute despair that Ernest Ivraine beheld how resolutely the old baronet stuck to his money chests; how each new mortgage deed, which he locked up in his *escritoire*, seemed to remove a wrinkle from his furrowed brow; how every shilling of interest he received infused a drop of warm fresh blood into his veins; how every guinea he could wring from any one, by law, or fraud, or intimidation, brought strength into his gaunt spare frame, new lustre to his hollow gleaming eye, additional force and harshness to his voice, and a greater

thirst for gold, and a firmer purpose to live for its possession.

Day by day Ernest Ivraine saw that which, as Henry once had said, *must* come to him, decrease in value. Every hour his father's speedy death or his father's favourable will became of more importance to the impatient watcher for death's tardy approach: the gloom on the young man's brow grew deeper, and the anxiety of his soul more intense, as he beheld fresh mortgages piled on the entailed estate, and the money thus raised, either lent out at higher rates of interest, or else invested in houses and lands and properties, in which, unless he could induce his parent to bequeath them to him, he had no interest or claim, direct or indirect.

Some said he was resigned, others that he was mercenary; his relatives, that he was only constitutionally melancholy, habitually discontented: Ernest Ivraine himself knew what a dark vampire-like thought was tearing his heart to pieces, whilst he was merely dimly conscious that affection for Henry was the bright star that shone on steadily amidst all the gloom of surrounding objects; that it was the soft spot of his soul, the green oasis in the wilderness, which prevented the whole of his present and future becoming a dreary unprofitable waste.

Love for the brother who had gone forth so nobly and bravely to battle with and in the world; who had done what *he* could not do,—cast the accursed thing far from him and fled, as a good man may flee from the temptation he feels he would be impotent to withstand, came it but near enough him. Love for the youth who, when a child, had been dear unto the heart of her who was now an angel in heaven; for him who had been his companion as a boy, his friend as a man: who was so full of courage and gentleness, of soldier-like bravery and womanly tenderness: who had despised and spurned the vague promise of future wealth: who had urged, in accents which rung through life in Ernest's ears, his brother to choose the nobler and the better part: who had suffered, because of his parent's cruel partiality for the metal that lures men on to perdition, equally with Ernest, and yet who had prayed him not to hope for *their* parent's death: who could not go without bidding that parent farewell: who had wept to leave, not Paradise and its riches, but home and his stern dark brother behind him.

There was good in both, — there must have been, else Ernest had never been loved by Henry; good to be preserved or eradicated; good to be de-

veloped or to be crushed; good that had come to both, not from father or grandfather, not from any Ivraine, Baronet or Mister, who ever walked over the earth and darkened it with his shadow,—but from a gentle woman, who, in default of houses and lands, great wealth and noble lineage, left to those two—her only children—something of her own tender, honest nature, which sent the younger out a resolute wanderer into the world, and preserved the elder from utter ruin during years haunted by dark thoughts and dark wishes and dark everything, save deeds.

Often in the winter evenings, when the white wood ashes strewed the hearth, and an almost extinguished log smouldered dimly away to powder, Ernest sat with his face buried in his hands, pondering on that last interview with his brother, thinking and considering and pondering, till at length, forgetful of all save the dreary present and the bright free world beyond, he started up to go forth, then and there, an humble follower in Henry's footsteps. But the old doubts, the old fears, the old plans, the constant expectations, came sweeping the next moment through his mind; and, sinking down again, he murmured, "Not now, it cannot be," and surrendered himself captive once more to the demon

who kept him chained for ever in that house, listening with intense longing and gloomy impatience for the solemn measured footfalls of him who came so tardily—Death.

That numerous class of would-be consolers and real afflicters, whom we briefly term "Job's comforters," have a custom of telling those whose griefs are so severe and self-evident as to preclude the present possibility of doubt or mitigation, that, if they will only have patience, time must soothe their sorrows or perhaps remove them altogether; and it was a firm idea of this kind which enabled Ernest Ivraine to bend, with an outward semblance of melancholy resignation to his—fate, for so he was pleased to term that weary servitude which he could have left any day, as Henry had done, proud and strong in noble self-reliance.

But, feeling thoroughly satisfied that the lapse of time would ultimately end all by removing his father to eternity, he waited and endured for years, and never made an effort to follow his brother, who had just written him one brief line before leaving England.

"Nothing else presenting itself," he said, "I have fairly enlisted; before this reaches you, I shall be on my way to Portsmouth, thence to India.

Dear Ernest, my brother, will you not come and do likewise?"

No, Ernest would not. When he refused to listen to Henry's entreaties, whilst his feelings were excited and his mind irritated, it was scarcely probable he would take what he considered a step bordering almost on insanity, when cold prudence had resumed her dominion over the impulses of his soul, and stood pointing for ever with one chill hand towards the desolate struggling world, and with the other fixedly at his father's money chests.

He remained, therefore, a dark, solitary, almost sordid misanthrope amongst the dreary swamps of Paradise, striving to humour the miser's temper in all things, agreeing without question to his slightest wish, and yielding to his lightest fancy with the weakness of a woman,—but still, after the sulky manner of an obstinate child: bearing all taunts with the meekness of a saint; maintaining that profound silence which had come to be one of his distinguishing characteristics; lounging listlessly about the grounds; eternally pondering on when this would end, and striving with all his soul to advance not merely himself in the old man's good graces, but also his foolish brother Henry, who, being the miser's favourite son, and having almost a hand

certain on the golden coffer, had chosen to fling the key from him in disgust, because he lacked the patience and the calculating nature necessary to enable him to wait till death, entering the mansion, should give him leave to turn the same in the wards and take possession of the guineas and title-deeds and mortgages of Sir Ernest Claude Ivraine, Baronet, deceased.

There were many men (even amongst those who termed the elder son mercenary) who would have seized the opportunity afforded by Henry's rashness, to insinuate themselves into the old miser's good graces by speaking harshly and unjustly of the absent one; but Ernest was not such as these. It might have won esteem from any one whose esteem was worth possessing to see how carefully Ernest, for months after his brother's departure, strove to conceal from the baronet knowledge of the step he had so decidedly taken: but the young man had no confidant; he never spoke of his thoughts or actions to human being: the wrong he did all men were at liberty to note if they would, for the wrong is frequently far too apparent, and is generally seized and remarked upon with avidity; but his virtues and his good deeds were fully revealed unto the eye of Him alone, Who seeth all things, and Who

knew the deep disinterested love Ernest Ivraine bore towards his absent brother, whom never, even in thought, did he dream of striving to supplant in the affections, or rather in the will, of his parent. No; if Henry were left well off, he knew wealth abundant would come to him; if, on the contrary, fortune smiled for once on his own dark gloomy brow, he would share all equally with the fair-haired youth who so resembled his mother. He remained at Paradise to keep his other relatives at bay, to detect their schemes, defeat their plans, guard the castle of the old man's understanding from being undermined by their ingenious stratagems and devices; but rivalry of Henry, his own brother! Ernest, though he had confessed so openly to desiring his father's death, would have hated himself had such an idea ever entered into his brain; nay more, had any one presented it to him, he would have loathed the heart that suggested, and the tongue that spoke, the insinuation which mind and feeling and affection all alike indignantly rejected.

For weeks and weeks the miser never inquired about Henry; but, at last, whatever of love dwelt in his soul for mortal being, yearning towards his younger born, he became vaguely uneasy at his protracted absence, and accordingly

asked Ernest casually "when his brother would be home?"

"Not for a long time I fear, sir," he answered.

"Why, what is he doing? where has he gone?" demanded the baronet, a touch of anxiety softening his usually harsh tone.

"He has gone to India," was Ernest's reply; and, as the answer grated on his ear, the old man walked towards a window like one struck with some sudden pain. He gazed with vacant wandering eye over swamps and fields and trees, but his mental vision took no cognizance of these things; at the moment he forgot even his hoards of useless treasure, for Henry, his youngest son, the only being on earth for whom he had, since boyhood, entertained a shadow of unselfish affection, it seemed had uttered *that* night no idle threat when he said he "was going away for years, perhaps for ever."

Now he had actually departed; deserts and oceans, forests, mountains, plains, waters, stretched between the baronet and the ever murmuring, ever repenting, always noble, high spirited youth. Henry had passed forth from the home of his childhood; his father's hand had securely closed the gates behind him, and the old familiar places (desolate and for-

lorn though they might be,—still once familiar) knew him "no more."

And, as Longfellow says that the sound of those two words resembles the moaning of winter winds through ancient pine forests, so the rapid reflection that on earth they might never meet again, sent a chill cold feeling to the miser's soul.

"I thought nothing, save the loss of a sovereign, could have so moved him," reflected Ernest; but Ernest was wrong. God is good and great; there is no land, however barren, that hath not some verdant spot, some oasis shining in the midst of the desert; and, even in this most sordid, selfish world there never yet existed any mortal being who did not love something—child, father, brother, wife—well, after his fashion.

Now that knowledge of Henry's being more dear than aught save gold could be to the baronet's heart entered into the comprehension of Ernest Ivraine, he strove more sedulously than ever to keep the old man in darkness concerning *how* his son had gone forth to breast the storms of fate; to prevent his learning that an Ivraine, one of *his* mean, proud, haughty, contemptible race, was serving his God, his king, his country, and himself in the ranks,—a common soldier; that Henry had chosen to bind the

long chain of scarlet slavery round his neck, sooner than submit to the more unendurable, inactive slavery of home; that, amongst those whom Sir Ernest had always considered the lowest of the low —the sons of the tillers of the earth, the paid defenders of their native land, the poor, the uneducated, the strong-handed, the bone and sinew of Britain—one of his blood was living. The elder son endeavoured, with paternal zeal and tenderness, to keep such dreadful knowledge from his father. But the winds of heaven bear secrets to the minds of those from whom mortals vainly hope to bar them out; and thus at length, somehow, through the officiousness of some meddling friend or evil-disposed relative, the baronet at length heard truth which, if disagreeable, is always sure to rise out of the bottom of her well and to float conspicuous on every surface bubble.

"How has your brother gone out to India, sir?" broke forth Sir Ernest one day, immediately on his return from the nearest large town.

"He really did not precisely inform me," said the elder son, fervently trusting that that and many another equivocation he had uttered on the same topic would be forgiven him.

"Don't tell me falsehoods," thundered out his

father, "I know perfectly well how he has gone, and what he has done: disgraced his name and his house, himself and myself, his connections in every part of the kingdom. Heavens! grant me patience to think of it! Henry Ivraine, my son—yes, *my* son, a common private—a vagabond soldier!"

"That he has entered the army, I believe," said Ernest, the blood rushing for once up into his sallow cheek; "but how, in what rank, whether as officer or as private, no person save some one in his fullest confidence can exactly tell; nor has any one a right to surmise without accurate information on the subject. Thus much I do know, however, sir, positively, no matter who may strive to turn your heart against him, that, let his position in the service be high or low, inferior or exalted, Henry Ivraine, *your* son, *my* brother, will never disgrace one of us: he would not be a vagabond, if he were a beggar; I should believe in his truth and integrity and honour if I saw him stand before me an accused felon to-morrow, and I have faith and hope that whatever he may be now, he will rise to name and station and fortune yet."

"He will," angrily repeated the baronet, with a horrible distortion of face; then, suddenly checking the remainder of the sentence, he said, sneering bit-

terly, "You grow eloquent," and abruptly left the apartment.

And Ernest, seeing that *their* chances were lessened by one half,—that on him alone depended their hopes of wealth, or even a bare competency, braved more resolutely and gloomily than ever the depressing swamps and vapours of Paradise from day to day, week to week, year to year, guarding and striving to advance his brother's interests and his own, longing, dreading, hoping, fearing for the approach of him who alone could fully reveal and finally decide their destinies—Death.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BARONET'S FIRST BORN.

But as the mariner, tossing on the bosom of the ever-restless, always treacherous, ocean, clings with might and main to the quivering mast, though aloft storms surround, and tempests howl about him, whilst below lies the sure, certain calm of the grave, so the miser baronet resolutely grasped the volume of life, perhaps with even a firmer clutch than he might have done, had its numerous pages contained the story of an existence devoted to the good and well-being of his fellow-creatures. As the slave strives for freedom, as the wretched do for peace, as the weary pine for rest, as the drowning catch at straws, as the sailor seizes the saving spar,—so, with similar eagerness, Sir Ernest kept an unrelaxing hand on that which many an one would gladly relinquish any day; for more than mothers love their children and some men love fame, than others love

station, than the young love pleasure, or the old repose, the miser loved gold: dearer was it unto his soul than mortal affection or immortal expectations; than comfort, or ease, or luxury, or virtue, or principle: the hope of adding the merest trifle to his hoard seemed more in his eyes than the hope of salvation; the dread of letting one sixpence pass by his greedy hand swallowed up all fear or horror of perdition.

Though life was to him a mere sordid existence, he resolved to "take the most out of it," as he did out of everything else: gold was the only thing he cared for, and, to go on acquiring it, life was necessary; and so he clung to the latter and amassed the former with a perseverance which, if employed in a better cause, would have made him an unspeakable benefactor to his species.

The wrinkles on his withered face grew daily deeper; the lines below his eyes and round his mouth became marked and fixed, as if they had been chiselled there; the twisted veins on his high narrow forehead looked, spite of the sallow skin that only partially concealed them, like crawling reptiles wandering through his flesh; his hands seemed to get more like talons—the long colourless nails like claws; his tone grew shriller and harsher; his step

more uncertain and rapid than ever; his temper more unbearable; his mood more changeable; his spirit more litigious: but still the bright light of former times gleamed in his eyes; there was purpose in his thought, command in his voice, energy in his mind: age might do its worst upon him, but Sir Ernest defied it to kill him; he shook one trembling hand undauntedly in the face of time, and, laying the other firmly on the principle of vitality, refused to die. Men, with no business, no purpose, no plan, might lie down in their narrow graves if it so pleased them any day; but the miser had work to do, which, if properly carried out, would last him for ever: and so he lived on, faithfully serving *his* God as few men serve *their* God. He never attempted the impossible task of serving two masters; but, taking Mammon for his, worked and slaved and toiled at his bidding with fifty times more vigour and determination than those do who profess to be laying up treasures for themselves in that land "where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." He lived on—and Ernest waited.

As men do wait who wish for what they dared not speak of—with outward patience, with intense irritability, with feverish thirst, and dark heart, and

darker reveries; saved from utter ruin by one good purpose, by one unselfish object which he strove to gain, not for his own sake, but for that of Henry.

He had formed a resolution the day of his brother's departure, about which he never said a syllable to any one, which was to scrape together, by some indefinite means, an amount sufficient to buy Henry a commission. Many amiable persons, as they are usually termed, constantly plan generous and philanthropic projects, but never carry them out; and others, who are charmed by their wordy benevolence, take the will for the deed, and think better of such empty talkers than of their silenter fellows, who talk not at all and act much. With Ernest, however, to think was not to speak, but to do; to resolve was to perform, not brilliantly or rapidly, but silently and probably tardily.

He neither possessed the hope nor the talents of his brother; but he had a kind of invincible obstinacy, or adhesiveness, of disposition, which caused him, whenever he had once made up his mind on any point, to stick thereto with unswerving tenacity. It might be years after,—it might be towards the close of life,—other and brighter prospects might arise before him, obstacles might present themselves, difficulties appear, but it was much the same to him:

he walked aside, or round, or over; he stood still, or strode on; but whichever course he pursued, it was *in his character* to keep his eye ever steadily fixed on the object he had once determined to reach, and never for one moment to remove his gaze from the contemplation thereof. To a nature like this, it was a matter of no small importance what he decided was worth striving or waiting for in life. As weak characters change their ideas every hour, it follows, *par consequence*, that what they resolve to do to-day signifies not in the least, as it is quite certain not to be carried out to-morrow: but, with a man whose resolves are not to be shaken, it becomes almost an affair of temporal and eternal welfare that he shall resolve well, or else not at all; for, if the bad be chosen, it cannot, in the hands of one blessed or cursed with such a temperament, work for aught else than evil; and, if the good be embraced, it can never, even by a mischance, turn out completely ill.

Thus it was fortunate that, while much of wrong entered Ernest's mind, right had obtained part posses sion of his soul too; wherefore the one, guided, and the other clouded, his life: his heart resembled the briny ocean, filled to suffocation with unhealthy thoughts and dangerous wishes; but, affection for

Henry, dashing like the rapid mountain torrent through the flood, kept still a portion of his nature pure and undefiled. As in the natural world, so in the moral; the two waters ebbed and flowed ceaselessly, but never mingled—a drop of the salt never mixed with the other: the brine never became fresh, nor the fresh, brine. Living a life so lonely and retired, neither passion ever got so far from land as to be swallowed up in that larger ocean which cools hatreds, quenches loves, tears the magnifying glass—self-pity—from the eye and reveals wrongs, as they frequently are, mere bubbles on the surface; which divides friends, reconciles enemies, makes some better, many worse, mends a few, mars more; which most pant to enter; which all are loath to leave; that busy, ever-varying, ever-deceitful, ever-inviting ocean, on which all sigh to try their frail barks; whose characteristic is turmoil, whose mandate is toil, whose boundary is eternity; over whose surface keeps ever sailing the grim pilot, Death,—who takes one from his pleasure boat and another from his merchant vessel; the child from his little skiff; the fisherman from his tarry yawl; the officer from the man of war; the pirate from his ill-gotten prize; the traveller from his comfortless ship: who picks off a man from the crew of every bark, and

removes them from that mighty ocean, the World, for ever.

In that bustling arena Ernest Ivraine, though he might have lost something, would assuredly have gained much; but he had determined to sit out the drama of his father's existence till the curtain finally dropped on the last act of the interminable piece. And whilst he wearied over scene after scene of that which some deem a comedy, and others a tragedy—life,—he strove to diversify the incidents of his own existence a little, by working earnestly at the plan he had formed for Henry's advancement that morning when they parted. Often, when sleep—that heaven-sent angel which visits millions of the poor and needy, and passes by the couches of those who toil not with their bodies for their daily bread—refused to fall either lightly or heavily, or, in fact, at all on his weary eyelids, Ernest began to reflect about his brother, so refined in his tastes, so striking in appearance, so tender of heart, living as a common soldier amongst rude companions, far away from any friend, prevented by rank and circumstances from forming a single acquaintance in his own grade of society. He thought of his dead mother and his surviving parent; of his home and its occupants; of the trifling sum which could raise

Henry and emancipate both; and, knowing how hopeless it would be to expect to wring even a guinea from the miser's chest, he vowed firmly to work out his brother's deliverance by some means, and wait patiently himself till destiny should do the same good generous turn by him.

Most amongst us feel wonderfully inclined to believe in the assertion of "where there 's a will there 's a way;" but no one blessed by that worthy dame, whom we call our mother—Nature—with half an ounce of the invaluable commodity, rarely to be met with, always to be devoutly prayed for,—yclept common sense, can deny that same way often proves a most desperately tedious and round-about one. So at least Ernest Ivraine found: there was not a device or an expedient which he did not think of to gain money; he spared no time, nor thought, nor fatigue, to become the possessor of so many hundred pounds in hard cash. But, though he did make some way, he discovered his crippled efforts so mightily resembled trying to cut through a log of timber with an oyster knife, that fifty times he would have abandoned his effort in disgust and despair had something stronger than love of self not held him to his weary, money-getting, sterile post.

About a large property, barren though it may be, there are many perfectly legitimate openings for a son to gain a little of the precious metal, even though his parent be lord and master of the estate and entitled to the revenues derivable therefrom. So soon as Ernest perceived this fact, he wondered it had never revealed itself to his understanding before, and became, not like Nimrod, a mighty hunter, but an amateur farmer, who grew learned in all sorts of agricultural mysteries, who came to know the value of a sheep, the weight of that Jewish horror —the pig, the market value of a cow, and, above all, the intrinsic beauty and worth of that finest amongst animals—a horse.

It is not, perhaps, very desirable for any gentleman to become "professionally versed" in this latter point, since knowledge of racers and acquaintance with that numerous and ill-reputed class, called "jobbers," generally brings individuals into company where, to say the least of it, they had best not be, and not unfrequently conducts them to that disagreeable finale, the Court of Bankruptcy. But Ernest Ivraine was too proud and reserved ever to make friends, or rather familiars, of his inferiors: no one could assert his acquaintances were ostlers, that his drawing-room was the stable, his associates men

who at "Tattersalls do congregate." He had no taste for races,—no propensity to, or predilection for, gambling; he never entered a horse for a "Cup" anywhere, he made no bets, took no odds: he reared and sold for employment and for—Henry.

There were not wanting those amongst his connections, who had formerly termed him a mercenary though indolent hanger-on for the crumbs that might fall to his greedy hand from death's table, who now termed him, in angry contempt, "a gentleman horse-jockey:" but, if he did lay himself in the slightest degree open to such an imputation, surely the deed, in this instance, justified the means; for nothing could be nobler than to aid a struggling brother; and if trading in black and grey and brown and chesnut quadrupeds be not the most respectable profession in the world, it is no worse than many another, if followed fairly and honestly.

Sir Ernest laughed in his most diabolical manner at those who represented that his son had fairly started in the race on that road which is universally admitted to lead to ruin. "There is more in that fellow than I ever thought," he said; "he is making Paradise of real value: he gives me the whole of the profits, and I let him, now and then, have an animal to rear and get what he can out of it. He

wants a small sum of money, he says, for something or other; and, as he improves my property, I humour his whim: he adds, he is "happier" employed about the place, seeing after the labourers, and so forth, than in doing nothing; and as, though he looks no happier than before, he benefits my purse, I agree to his fancy. Mutual accommodation, reciprocal advantages! father and son, owner and heir, pulling the same way—for once working disinterestedly together! ha! ha!" and the old man chuckled at the idea till the veins in his forehead became more conspicuous, and the expression of his countenance less human than ever.

And, in truth, as years rolled on, the father and the son did seem to agree so admirably, and to become so communicative, after their extraordinary fashion, that relatives, far and near, trembled for their respective interests in the old man's will, and silently struck an all important nought from the sum they had once fondly hoped he would leave them; whilst Ernest first made shillings pounds, and pounds twenties, and twenties hundreds, and silently gathered together the sum needful to make Henry a lieutenant, and began to feel his hope of a favourable bequest strengthen, and to rejoice he had not, like his brother, cast fortune from him, and

to yearn more sinfully and eagerly than ever for his father's death, ere a change came.

Meantime letters arrived from Henry, at long intervals and uncertain periods, as they always do from the proud but unsuccessful; they were short, though affectionate; the high confident tone soon vanished from the sheet. True, he had, occasionally, little scraps of good fortune and approving notice to recount: he was a corporal, had gained a stripe, two stripes, three—he was a sergeant: his officer, a hard, stern, Waterloo hero, had said he was as brave a fellow as ever lived, and prophesied great things for him; but Henry wrote all this in a manner which spoke quite as much of mortification as of pleasure; of a heart that was despairing,—as of one which strove still to hope.

"He was climbing," he once briefly said. "Yes," thought Ernest, "but it is as the tortoise climbs up the weary hill to fame; so slowly that life will be finished before he reach the summit, or even a pleasant halting place half-way."

The awful gulf that separates the ranks from the mess table, which birth, unassisted by influence, cannot cross; which money can only pass with a golden bridge; which valour dyes crimson with its best blood in its frantic endeavours to stem,—yawned

between Henry and success. It had not seemed so wide or impracticable at a distance; but now, when the impetuous young man stood on the brink, he saw how almost impossible he should find it to reach the other side, without a helping hand stretched forth to aid his endeavour. "No one to help you," Ernest had said ere he left his home behind him. "No one to help you?"

"Except God and myself," Henry had then promptly replied; and should he who, amidst the depressing swamps of Paradise had firm faith in the power of God, and humble confidence in the abilities and energies with which his Creator had gifted him, doubt now?

Ah! it is easy for men always to be brave in action; but who, on the surface of this wide earth, is constantly so in thought? Not Henry Ivraine, who grew sick, and faint, and hopeless, even whilst he presented a cheerful face against adverse circumstances, and prepared him sternly, day by day, to meet the weary struggle men call life.

He said he never repented; and it was true, for his motive now for exertion was an honest one; whilst the former, spoken of as the reason for endurance, seemed to his good manly heart, mean and sinful. But he was disappointed, as others have

been, and others must be,—as it seems to be the will of the Universal Disposer of all events that, at some time or other in their careers, most shall be. He strove to conceal knowledge of this from Ernest; strove to smother the feeling, even as it arose in his breast; and so for years he continued trying to wait patiently for that which he had long begun to fear never would arrive unto him—success.

Ernest grieved for the blight which he saw had fallen on the once hopeful spirit; but he comforted himself by thinking how proudly, after this severe probation, his brother would wear his epaulettes; how nobly he had deserved that which merit seemed impotent to win: he felt glad to reflect that Henry would be made happy by him, and he longed to tell his father that the "vagabond soldier" was at length a respected officer. Dearer to him, oh, far dearer, was Henry the disappointed, than Henry the sanguine. He had possessed love for the latter, it is true; but he had love and sympathy to give to the former, who required both,—yet would fain have concealed that his impetuous daring heart, and unfortunate position, made him stand so wofully in need of two of the best gifts bountiful Heaven has placed in the hands of man to bestow on his stricken and struggling fellow—assistance and compassion.

Years had rolled away since they two parted; since that night when, by the blazing wood fire, Henry told his final resolution to his brother; since that night when, in semi-darkness, with the half-extinguished logs smouldering on the hearth, he confronted his parent and spoke bitterly, impetuously, but truthfully to him for the last time; since that night when Ernest dissuaded and he persisted; when it was free to both to go, or both to stay; when the elder tossed restlessly on his couch, as the hours given, not to repose, but to mental strife and sad deliberation, hurried, as such hours do, rapidly away, leaving, however, a vivid memory of every painful minute behind them; since that morning when the younger came to the bedside of his brother to hear his choice; when he roused the miser from slumber to say, with his pale, troubled, youthful, noble face confronting the old man's withered, sunken, sordid visage, that earnest word which comes in stifled tones from the heart when it is almost breaking,—good-bye; since that morning when his father closed the portals of home so securely behind him; when he and Ernest walked through the dense chill darkness preceding dawn for five dreary miles; when he saw the vehicle which was to take him a few stages on his long vague

journey; when he hung for a moment like a child upon his brother's neck; and still, though tears blinded his eyes, rushed resolutely to his fate: years had rolled away since then, changed the hopeful stripling into a disappointed man, and his gloomy desponding brother into a scarcely less gloomy hoper; had bronzed the fair cheek and subdued the high spirit of the one, and given a sort of purpose and one or two pleasant thoughts to the other. The first had been boyishly flinging stones at fortune's apples during all that period, and missed the mark for which he aimed; whilst the second perseveringly climbed the tree, at the top of which hung the inviting cluster he desired to grasp; and, as he ascended, he traded and bartered, to the end that he might fling Henry some of the heavy metal—gold—which, more sure in its operation than those unpolished gems, worth and merit, deemed by most, till seen in precious settings, common worthless stones of no account, was certain to bring down at the first throw the prize he had so long desired.

Years of care, of weariness, of anxiety, of sorrow, had passed over the heads of both men,—for men they were in every thought and feeling now,—and altered them in mind, appearance, hope, expectation, in almost everything, save the old sensations, hate and

love; for these two passions of the soul render the heart which hath been tried in the evil or the good fire of aversion or affection, invulnerable to change. As steel, thrice tempered, resists the strength of iron, so that portion of man's nature which hath once really passed through either of the glowing furnaces, lighted by wrongs or kindled by regard, defies the withering, chilling hand of time for ever, and remains through time loving or hating always.

And thus, after the lapse of all those years, Ernest was enabled to remit to Henry the sum needful to raise him from the ranks; and having, as he fondly hoped, after immense difficulty, thrown him the first broad stepping-stone leading to fortune, he turned him with more zeal and interest than ever to watch the progress he himself was making along the road to wealth.

For he had now a sort of double prize in view; he had two to please instead of one: he had not merely an avaricious father, but a widowed aunt, to humour. Wealth, treble what Henry had spurned in those far away days, treble what Ernest had then deemed worth trying for, was now in the house, ready to be taken possession of by *some one*, whenever the last breath struggled slowly through the

thin lips of the miser baronet and his still more sordid sister, who, having wedded in girlhood a man rich as some are in this mighty England, had saved and hoarded and made a private purse for herself during his lifetime, and finally induced him at death to bequeath everything which he could will away from his next kin to his childless widow; then fleeing, on the one hand, from the wrath of his relatives and the needy importunities of many of her own, she took refuge in Paradise, where she and Sir Ernest watched each other, as two dogs with bones a-piece watch, lest, by any lack of vigilance, a sovereign or a sixpence should be stolen from the hoard of either to find its way by an unaccountable process called, in vulgar language—thieving, into a money-chest in which it had never previously been locked.

The house that had formerly only been haunted by a tall, lean, meagre, sneering old man, was now also the abode of a little, sharp, vindictive, restless woman, who stole about on tiptoe and caught up everything that her brother overlooked, and pinched the limited establishment more than ever, and looked at morsels of meat and fragments of bread and atoms of wood and little pieces of soap with the eye of a woman who had only one aim and object in life, to save and hoard money as her brother did, only with

double eagerness, with a double zest, if that were possible.

"Close" was the name which heaven, in the person of her husband, had decreed she should be known by; and assuredly it was not an altogether inappropriate one, for she was so close of hand and heart, that Paradise grew more dreary every day after her arrival. And Ernest felt how insupportable this second chain would have made home, had it not been so beautifully gilded. He waited on now for them both to die, but neither felt inclined to do so at his bidding; he sometimes grew tired of the never-ending delay, but the prize had now become so great that it was better worth striving for than ever; besides which, after lingering so long, he was not going to give up now: and, beyond the gates of Paradise, no treasure lay within his reach; and the treasure within its gates he had at last grown to fancy himself certain of, if he only had patience and never despaired.

For his father was now most confidential and communicative: he consulted him about investments, legal cases, disputed points, contested questions; got him occasionally to transact such business for him as required no money to pass through the hands of his eldest born, who had come to be re-

garded by almost every one as his heir. And Mrs. Close also was, comparatively speaking, gracious to the grave, dark, stern young man, who never crossed her inclinations, who appeared so careful and fond of money-making, and who, above all, valued society so very little, and avoided, as if it had been a pestilence, all intercourse with his kind.

She liked him for his sins and faults; his father had never entertained any particular regard for him, but he had begun lately to feel he was of use to him, and to believe he would keep the guineas and acres of Paradise and the residue of his land and tenements "better together" than any other relative he was so fortunate as to possess. And neither, seeing further than the silent gloomy surface, knew aught of the character which lay beneath, and thought there was "nothing more" in Ernest, of any kind, good, bad, or indifferent.

CHAPTER XII.

A BONE OF CONTENTION.

Ernest Ivraine was just beginning to look with no ordinary impatience for an answer to his latest Indian despatch, when his father gave a sort of finishing stroke to the unusual confidence he had, for a little time previously, been reposing in his heir apparent, by sending that melancholy individual to London to consult a lawyer concerning the rights of him, Sir Ernest Claude Ivraine, in regard to a certain bridge, situate upon a certain road, which road passed through one portion of his domain of Paradise, and had been a thorn in the miser baronet's flesh, and a bone of contention betwixt him and four of his neighbours for years; ever since, in fact, by virtue of the death of his uncle, the last bad owner, he had succeeded to the swamps and poplars and house and domains of Paradise.

For the individuals above referred to contended

that it was a public road which they traversed, no thanks to him or anybody else, whilst Sir Ernest declared that it was merely because the matter was not worth the expense of a lawsuit that he permitted them to drive or walk or ride along it at all; but whether or not it had originally been public or private, one thing the baronet knew, and his opponents were conscious of, namely, that time and custom had taken from the former the power, though not the will, to close it up; and that, accordingly, common property it had to all intents and purposes become.

Great, therefore, was his rejoicing, when one winter night the torpid river, growing strong for once, swept down a bridge which spanned the road midway, leaving a gap that an extraordinarily well-mounted man might, perhaps, have cleared, but which, to ordinary mortals, carts, carriages, and gigs, presented an impassable barrier: the waters had done what he, with wealth and sense and cunning, had been impotent to effect, stopped the progress of his adversaries through his lands; and the baronet, who required the road but little himself, laughed and chuckled and rubbed his hands in a state of the utmost delight when Ernest informed him of the accident, and added an account of how carts and

horsemen and pedestrians, when they got so far, had been compelled to turn.

"I have them now," said Sir Ernest, all the wrinkles in his face growing more long and deep, as if to aid the expression of diabolical glee which lighted up his eyes; "I have them now!" and though his son was possessed of such discretion, and so little curiosity, as never to ask how his father "had" them, yet time made Ernest Ivraine fully understand the meaning of his worthy father's speech.

Great were the deliberations which ensued after the breaking down of the bridge in the little parish of Lorton, and in many another parish for miles round: the road was so essential to many landed proprietors; the amount of traffic along it was so great that the stopping of the mails could scarcely have occasioned a greater public sensation than the sweeping down of the three ancient arches: planks were thrown across, as temporary substitutes for honest stone and lime; but a stream, which occasionally laughs at key-stones and foundations, disdains timber, and almost perpetually, during the course of that most severe winter, intelligence was conveyed to Sir Ernest Ivraine, "that the bridge was down again;" on receipt of which gratifying intelligence

the baronet laughed horribly, as he had nothing to pay for the tidings, and took pleasure in the misfortunes of his neighbours; and we all know, and firmly believe, that "those may laugh who win."

Squires held solemn conclave as to "what was to be done," over their port and around their mahogany tables; farmers talked mournfully at markets about "them ere seven miles" they had been forced to drive round, in consequence of that "wexing voden bridge" having been carried off again; a sort of aristocratic and democratic landlord and tenant meeting was convened to discuss the matter, when one genteel landed proprietor said Sir Ernest ought to rebuild the bridge; and an immensely rich grazier said he "knowed the baronet would n't do no such thing no how;" and one of the auditors, a village blacksmith, remarked confidentially to his friend, he thought "the old screw would see them all sunk in it first." There was much speaking and contradicting, immense diversity of opinion, talking, arguing, some laughing; but at length the assemblage came to one desperate conclusion, after three hours bawling and listening, namely, to send a deputation to Sir Ernest Ivraine, stating the fact of the said bridge having fallen, and the inconvenience it occasioned, and requesting him accordingly to re-

pair it with all convenient speed; which "deputation," in the person of Mr. Medill, the baronet's attorney, and the attorney of most of his neighbours, waited on his client at Paradise, and communicated the "fact" and conveyed the wish of the late meeting held at Lorton.

"Do they acknowledge the road to be private property?" demanded Sir Ernest, when Mr. Medill had concluded.

That gentleman answered, he believed that was not a question which had been taken into consideration.

"Well, then let it be taken into consideration, and then I will give my reply," responded the baronet. The result of which response was that for one month he kept his enemies arguing and debating whether to admit his rights or maintain their own; and the subject was only at length brought to a conclusion by a speech of the baronet's, to the effect that, "if they acknowledged it to be a private road he would not rebuild the bridge, and if they could prove it to be a public one they might do it themselves."

Then ensued a talk of *making* the baronet yield; but Sir Ernest dared them to do it: then came a hope that the county would repair the bridge; but

the question being one of merely local interest, the county declined to interfere. So, at length, the squires and graziers came to the melancholy conclusion that, if the business were to be accomplished at all, it must be done by themselves; wherefore plans were drawn and tenders advertised for, and tenders received, and meetings held, and cost estimated, and designs proposed, and architects consulted.

"Let them build away," said Sir Ernest; "the road don't do me much harm, only I like them to have to pay for the privilege:" which Christian speech was occasioned by the recent purchase of some hundred acres of land that could only be reached by crossing the bridge the baronet intended his neighbours should build for him, unless, indeed, a *détour* of several miles were made. The road, being a public one, increased if anything the value of this, his last "bargain;" but the old man was too prudent to say so to any one, excepting his son, to whom confiding a secret was—as his father frequently affirmed—better than burying it, as it might be dug out of the earth, but never out of Ernest. Wherefore the only thing Mr. Medill could get from the miser, even in his most communicative mood, was,

"I won't give a penny towards it; they may

think themselves very safe that I do not serve them with notice not to build on my premises: they had best not torment me, or I may give them trouble yet. Let them build and be thankful."

But, as few men care to lay out money in a great hurry, midsummer came, with its bloom and its roses, and still the "bridge" was only on the tapis, not over the river. The latter ran slowly and quietly on its course, never dreaming, at that scorching season, of interfering with the beams and planks and supports which it had swept away at regular intervals during the previous winter; and the "select committee" of landed and other proprietors, who had taken on their brains and pockets the planning and building of the bridge, paused to reflect how their object might be happily accomplished, and still their purses be rendered none the lighter.

Two difficult points to be united; but what cannot time and thought effect, and enough of both assuredly the Lincolnshire sages expended on the subject. Autumn passed; there was no use beginning to build at that period of the year, so they took a month or two longer to debate the question, and when it would ever have been settled, or when the bridge would ever have been commenced, is uncertain, had not fresh floods swept the wooden substi-

tute off to some unknown bourne, and left the farmers lamenting.

They came in great force, and told the committee that a passage *must* be permanently made for them the moment spring permitted workmen to commence the undertaking; and, heaven having sent light to the understandings of the gentlemen composing the committee, and earthly agents having made that light still clearer, they all at once, to the astonishment of everybody, and ecstasy of themselves, stumbled on and printed a series of resolutions to the following effect:

"1st. That Mr. Jones's tender should be accepted; 2nd. That they, the four proprietors, would defray all expenses incurred about the business; 3rd. That they would consider themselves sole owners of the bridge; and 4th. That a gate should be erected, and a trifling toll exacted from the owner of each vehicle passing over it."

There was a something perfectly demoniacal in the fury that shook Sir Ernest Ivraine when the above resolutions were repeated to him: he stamped and swore with an intensity which alarmed even his sister, though the storm moved Ernest no more than if it had been the sighing of a summer breeze.

Have a toll on his property; charge his tenants

for drawing their produce over their confounded bridge; lessen his estate in value; make money by taking it out of his pockets! He would teach them they were miserably mistaken in their ideas; he would make them repent their insolence to him—a set of beggarly speculators. No, he would not consult Mr. Medill, or permit him to be sent for; he was good enough and clever enough, and, for an attorney, might be honest enough; but he was Sir Hugh Xifer's solicitor, and he should not, at least not in this instance, be his, because Sir Hugh (a paltry knight) he knew had held long conversations with him on the subject. Ernest should go to London and take the very best legal advice; and, if he had an inch of ground to stand on—if there were half a straw to split in the business—if he had a shadow of claim—he would give them (the whole committee, collectively and individually) such a dose of law as should be remembered by their great grandchildren, and teach all Lincolnshire to beware how an Ivraine was tempted to bite; he would have his rights, and his son should travel to London forthwith and ascertain them.

Whereupon Ernest, nothing loath, did proceed to the metropolis, armed with a little money and papers and deeds and instruments innumerable; and, im-

mediately on his arrival there, one chill afternoon in January, he went to the office of the gentlemen to whom his father had given him a letter, directed in a hand as crabbed and contracted as the temper and the soul of the miser, to Messrs. Scott and Smeek, solicitors, 18, Arras Street, Belerma Square.

And, as one event worthy of note had taken place in the house of Mr. John Merapie, situated in the above-named square, since last it was mentioned in this story, it may perhaps be well, ere speaking of the result of Ernest's conference, whilst he enters the solicitor's dingy office, to walk from Arras Street to number 12, Belerma Square, and see what had happened there in the interim. It was just about the period when the magnificent Lorton idea, which had so roused the ire of the owner of Paradise, was struggling to maturity in the muddy brains of his sworn enemy, Sir Hugh Xifer, that Mr. John Merapie entered his drawing-room with a peculiarly ominous expression of countenance, very different from his usual one of heavy good nature, which always conveyed to the minds of those who beheld him the correct impression that his business, whatever it might be, was perpetually "looking up."

Mrs. Frazer never noticing anything, excepting perhaps a satin dress or a fashionable bonnet, unless

the same were specially pointed out unto her, it would have been vain to expect her to observe the shadow resting on her brother's face; but Mina, from her quiet corner, saw it immediately, and a vague anxiety crept over her mind as she did so.

"Are you not well, uncle?" she demanded, as he stood moodily contemplating the fire.

He started at the question, and, hastily snatching up the poker, commenced a savage assault on the coals, whilst he answered,

"Quite well; why did you ask?"

"Because I thought you looked ill," she said.

"Ill!" exclaimed Mrs. Frazer; "oh! John is never ill. What strange things you do say, Mina: you are always thinking something."

"A deuced deal better than acting something, at any rate," retorted the merchant, turning with anything rather than an agreeable expression towards his sister. "I wish from my soul, Eliza, *your* favourite child were one half so good as this," and he pointed to Mina, who, growing very pale at his words, arose and, laying a hand on his arm, said earnestly,

"What *has* Malcolm been doing, uncle?"

"What has he not been doing excepting his duty for the last two years? that were nearer the mark!

He has been disobeying orders and promoting insubordination and spending a fortune and running in debt; he has been acting as, one might conclude, the head-strong, over-indulged, passionate son of an absurd foolish mother would, so well that he is finally dismissed the navy;" and, as he concluded, Mr. Merapie fiercely grasped the poker once again, whilst Mrs. Frazer sank back half fainting in the easy chair which she usually occupied.

"What is the matter?" demanded Mr. Westwood, at this crisis entering the room; and John Merapie, who had received letters containing the unwelcome intelligence just as he quitted his office, answered,

"Only my nephew's finishing performance, — bearding his officers, being insolent to them, disobeying orders, giving anxiety and annoyance to all his relatives, and, finally, casting himself adrift on the world without a profession or a shilling."

"Bad enough," remarked Mr. Westwood, drily; "but not so bad, let us hope, as it sounds. Poor Mrs. Frazer! the news has upset her. Let me assist you, Mina," he added; and, pretending not to notice her quiet, "thank you—it is not necessary," he sprinkled a little more water over the lady's face, and applied some perfumes to her forehead, as she slowly opened her eyes and said,

"Ah! is it you? I think they told me something dreadful about Malcolm; he is not dead, is he?"

"No, my dear madam, he is not; pray compose yourself," answered Mr. Westwood, whilst his partner muttered, in confidence, to the fire,

"Better that he were; what we shall do with him alive it is impossible for me to tell."

"But what has happened?" she inquired; "John said something, but I do not exactly remember."

"It is nothing," replied Mr. Westwood; "your son has merely left the navy, that is all."

"He has been put out of it, Eliza, in plain English," explained her brother, too much incensed to be melted into pity, either by swooning or fine feelings. "I have been expecting this for some time past, though I never said anything to you, for I knew you were fond of him and had no sense, and there was no use annoying you; but the money I have paid for that boy, since I fitted him out for sea, would almost have given Mina a fortune. I warned, threatened, implored, commanded, all to no purpose. I suppose the fellow lighted his cigars with my letters; at all events, the crash has come at last: he is finally dismissed the service, and you will very shortly have the unutterable gratification of seeing him."

"I never liked the idea of the sea," faintly began his mother.

"Good heavens, madam!" interposed Mr. Merapie, "you never rested night nor day till you got me to promise he should follow the bent of his and your inclinations to their fullest extent. *I* wanted him to enter my office and wash his absurd Highland pride off with some sensible English business habits; but you, whose connections, from time immemorial, were common tradespeople, set your face against my proposition: if there be one thing on earth I hate more than another, it 's folly. That is a capital joke, to be sure! You never liked the idea of the sea, indeed! Humbug!"

"I do so dislike the smell of pitch," explained the lady; but whether this observation had reference to the navy or to the classic locality where her brother's warehouse was situated, never accurately transpired, Mr. Merapie asking no questions, but merely declaring, "There were worse things in the world than pitch," which vague assertion implied volumes, as Mina felt.

"But what has he done?" inquired Mr. Westwood, in his most soothing accents; "we must not judge him hastily or harshly, particularly when he is not here to defend himself. What are the facts

of the case?" and Mr. Merapie's partner flung himself back in the chair, to the end that he might hear at his ease and at his leisure all the evidence which could be adduced against Malcolm. But, as that young gentleman's uncle was much too angry to be able to tell anything connectedly, it may be as well to give it in his nephew's own words, for he subsequently narrated the finishing exploit of his new career tolerably briefly, and, to do him justice, perfectly truthfully to his sister when she asked him concerning it.

"You see, Mina," he said, "there is not one bit of use denying it; I did go through a deal of money and I was very extravagant, and my uncle bore all wonderfully, and came out with the needful like a lord; and, before we set off on this last confounded Indian cruise, I resolved—indeed I did—to turn over a new leaf, and be economical, and give up smoking, and keep my temper when the officers were tyrannical, and, in brief, do what England, my uncle, and you all expected me to do—my duty.

"Well, I turned over the leaf as I had intended; but, unhappily, it proved worse even than its predecessor, for about ten lines or so from the top, just when I was getting into easy reading, I found—as a kind of marginal note—a pair of, what coloured

eyes? grey, I believe; but whatever they may have been, I never saw anything like them before, and pray I never may again, for they, with one glance, effectually settled my chances of naval prize money.

"I had never been 'in love,' but the moment I saw them I said, like an idiot as I was, 'my hour is come.' I'd have walked the plank cheerfully for her; therefore you need not be surprised to hear it was solely on her account I relinquished for ever my hope of a commission. At last, there was to be a ball on shore ('t was at Calcutta the thing occurred, I should inform you) to which I was invited, and to which she was going. The captain, always off amusing himself, hated to see us stir out of the vessel, and consequently I felt there was little use in asking his permission; still, just for the form, I did ask it, and he in answer, said 'No,' like an upstart sprig of mushroom nobility as he was.

"That 'no' I knew to be as unchangeable as if pronounced by the Medes and Persians; so I betook myself to the ship's side and looked sulkily down at the dirty river, and thought about my father having been an officer, and all our ancestors for generations having been exactly what they should have been, and considered how they would

have borne a point blank refusal to a civil request from the great grandson of a pedlar; and I reflected that, if any one of them could have risen from his grave, he would have said, 'Prove yourself worthy of your name and of your birth place, and do what you wish as you wish, in spite of all the captains in the English navy.' Moreover, the eyes I told you of just now arose before my imagination; and, to cut all my ruminations short, I exclaimed, striking my clenched hand on the hardest object near me — it tingled for an hour afterwards,—

"'I *will* go, let the arch-fiend himself try to prevent me.'

"But if all accounts of his Satanic majesty be true, he is rather fond of luring thoughtless youths on to destruction by presenting means for them to gratify their inclinations. I had a dim idea of swimming ashore when it got a little dark, for the captain and some of the principal officers were going to dine with one of the great magnates of the place, and I knew I could elude the others; but, suddenly it occurred to me that it would be easier and altogether more comfortable to go in the boat with them, a feat I accomplished, thanks to the dusk, and a whole lot of bags and packages of one kind and another, which were piled over me by the

sailors, who were, of course, unconscious that anybody lay underneath these articles. Well, I never stirred till my captain was out of sight; but, after he and the rest had departed, the men saw me standing on the landing-place, at which they were not at all surprised, as it was merely what they had witnessed twenty times before when I was absent on leave; and it was agreed that, as the captain's party was not to return in the boat that night, I should; which arrangement quashing all difficulties, I started off quite happy to the ball.

She was there, and we danced and we talked, and I imagined she would have gone to Kamtschatka with me, only I was mistaken, and all went merry as a marriage bell; and, in a perfect ecstasy of delight, I at length tore myself away, and, with her parting words ringing like music in my ears, started off for the boat. Had I only gone straight to it, I should have been in H.M.S. Sunflower till now; but, fate flinging across my path some of the crew, countrymen of my own, sterling fellows to the back bone, my evil genius whispered that, as they had done much for me, it was incumbent on me to do some little for them.

"'Are you ready, my lads?' said I.

"'Quite, sir,' was the response.

"'Should you feel inclined to drink my health, and that of my uncle, the laird of Craigmaver?'

"When a Scotchman asked, how could Scotchmen refuse? in short, Mina, to get quickly over a disagreeable story, I was so liberal that they got tipsy, became unmanageable, quarrelled with the people of the house, and turned the master out of doors.

"He raised a mob of the natives, who came howling like demons about the place: meanwhile time pressed; it was needful for us to reach the ship by some means, and every moment the crowd increased, the din became greater.

"'If I just had a gude thorn cudgel,' said one of the sailors, 'I would na fear a reegiment o' the tawny faced deevils.'

"'Well,' I replied, 'in default of the thorn, take a leg off that table,' pointing to one which the next moment was in pieces; and thus splendidly armed, out we sallied. To have heard the cowards so long as a door separated us, you would have imagined murder, at the least, was what they contemplated; but when I cried 'We 'll make you remember the Highlanders,' and commenced, with the sailors, striking right and left, they fled like chaff before the wind, yelling horribly.

"We walked quietly on to the boat, till a shrewd,

cautious old fellow, from Aberdeen, called out, 'Dinna study the manners o' rinnin', but rin like brownies, for here they come wi' the chokadars, as they ca' them, and there 'll be English music the morn if they get a grip o' us.'

"We did not 'stand on the order of going,' you may depend, Mina, but showed them that night what Highland legs as well as Highland arms could do: they ran, and we ran; it was a sort of second Canobie Lea affair, only without horses; and, as we pulled off, we laughed back a defiance to them over the waters: but I knew all was up with me; I felt it so surely, that I hardened myself for the result, which, like all evil events, was not very long of coming. First thing next morning, or rather *that* morning, off came a party to inquire which of the midshipmen and sailors of the Sunflower had been concerned in the *fracas;* and, whilst they were haranguing, a boat, which had been sent ashore for the captain, hove in sight.

"The minute he appeared, my last hope of escape vanished; I could not let the men suffer for what had been actually my folly, and so confessed to having been on shore, though to this hour, I believe, he has only a dim idea how I got there.

"I need not tell you all that followed. What he

said to me, and what I said to him, sounded a vast deal better at the time than it would do on repetition. He was rude, and I—the officers thought—insolent: so, by way of preventing my ever turning over a third leaf in the navy, and to get rid of a very troublesome individual, they finally decided on dismissing me the service; and so, Mina, to end all, here am I, whilst she of the grey eyes married, four weeks afterwards, a commander of a battery, or something of that sort, with whom heaven send she may live happily. And, talking of these subjects, I 'd be very glad, indeed, to know what that low upstart fellow, Westwood, whom my uncle has thought fit to take into partnership, means by calling you 'Mina,' and walking about this house as if it were his own."

"You remember, Malcolm, he used to call me so when I was a child."

"Well, but you are not a child now, and I do not like it, Mina, and I do not like him, and I do not intend to bear his confounded patronizing airs any longer."

"You had better, Malcolm," she said.

"Better! and why, pray?" he demanded.

"Because," she answered earnestly, "he can make my uncle believe anything and do anything;

and you know how disappointed he is about your being dismissed, and——"

"Looks upon my breach of discipline quite as severely as if I had murdered my superior officer, or stolen money from him, or committed some other dreadful crime. Yes, I see all that; and how savagely he glances at me, and how rarely he speaks a syllable directly to his dutiful nephew when he can help it; but I am not one bit afraid of Uncle John: he will come round in good time and do what is right and just, no matter who tries to influence him. He will never cut us out, depend upon that; and, if he die without a will, why, we are his nearest and only relatives."

"Dear Malcolm, he is not going to die," said Mina, as if the suggestion and the way it was made pained her.

"I am sure I hope not," he responded; "for I will say this much for Uncle John, that a kinder and better man never breathed; and that is just what makes me feel so certain he will always give us a share of his money whilst he lives, and when he dies—which, I trust, may not be till we are grey-haired, Mina—he will bequeath it to us; and, because I know his heart so well, I say I neither fear Westwood nor any man living, and I shall, there-

fore, take an early opportunity of showing him that my sister is not going to marry every promoted clerk who thinks fit to imagine himself a suitable husband for her."

"Malcolm, are not you very fond of me?"

"Yes, sister mine; but, as a consequence of that, I hope you are not going to inform me you are very fond of him."

"I dislike and despise him," she answered; "but latterly, I have also grown to fear him. What it may be, I do not know; but I am positive there is something wrong somewhere: latterly, Mr. Westwood's manner has changed completely; he used to be polite, almost to servility, and cautious and prudent to a degree; but now you would think he was master of our destinies. Oh! Malcolm, take care that he be not really so."

"What has put that idea into your mind?" he demanded.

"My own observation and——"

"Miss Caldera," interposed Malcolm, "who wants to settle you as she does every other girl in London, if she could; but she sha'n't in this instance, at any rate. I do not choose that you should marry this man, and I am determined to bring affairs to a crisis by some means. Ever since my uncle went to Hol-

land, I, too, have noticed the change in Mr. Westwood's manner, from extraordinary civility to a sort of triumphant insolence. There is no use asking my mother to make a stand against his visits, for she likes them, and he amuses her; and, besides, she could not understand: but, whenever Uncle John returns, I will have a stop put to his partner's assumptions. Before I entered the navy, I remember thinking him a pleasant good-natured sort of fellow; but I declare to you, Mina, upon my honour, I could have flung him out of the window fifty times during the course of this last week with the greatest pleasure."

"You may do foolishly to quarrel with this man," she said.

"Do you want to marry him?" he fiercely demanded; "because, if you wish to disgrace yourself and your connections by wedding an upstart without birth, or position, or anything, that alters the question."

Almost for the first time in her life, Mina checked an angry reply, which had nearly escaped her lips.

"Do not let us quarrel, Malcolm," she said; "if you think I could care for him, you are mistaken; but that, at present, is not the point at issue: I feel we may do wrong to offend him, and you know you

ought to be doubly careful in your conduct now, as——"

"As I am in disgrace with the powers that be," finished Malcolm, seeing her hesitate; "thank you, Mina, for your amiable consideration."

"As you are in disgrace," she continued boldly, "you ought to be most prudent; and it might be well for you, dear brother, to reflect, as I have lately been doing, that, although my uncle is rich and generous and half brother to our mother, and has brought us up and educated us, still, when all is said, he is not bound to provide for us, and, Malcolm, he may not do it."

"And for these reasons it is extremely desirable for you to be 'settled;' and Mr. Alfred Westwood being the only eligible, or ineligible, opening you and Miss Caldera can see at present, you want to be polite to him yourself, and desire that I should be so too: is not that it, Mina?"

Once again the angry blood mounted to her face, and she vehemently asked,

"Did you ever see me polite to him, ever since I grew up, ever since I was a child, ever since I began to comprehend his character and aims and views and wishes? only speak the truth, it is all I ask."

"Well, no," Malcolm confessed; "but then, you

see, politeness was never considered your forte, and your manner has always been much the same to him as to everybody else. If I did not know you were Captain Frazer's daughter and my sister, I confess I should be at a loss to determine the exact nature of your feelings towards Mr. Westwood."

"You are very unjust, Malcolm," she cried.

"Well, perhaps I am," he laughed; but promise me one thing, and I will doubt you no more. Do not be influenced by Miss Caldera or anybody else; but, if this man ever asks you to marry him, will you say 'No' to him, as you can and frequently do say it to other people, promptly and decisively; let there be no mistake about the matter: what say you, sister; will you promise?"

"Faithfully," she answered; "and, on the other hand, will you be cautious how you offend him; will you, at least, be civil till my uncle returns home?"

"Agreed," responded Malcolm; "and then I will talk the matter over with him, for it shall never be said, never! that a sister of mine married a man of no birth."

Having delivered which decisive blow to the matrimonial projects of Alfred Westwood, Esq., the *ci-devant* midshipman, who had lately acquired some

wonderful and most erroneous ideas on the subject of his own and his family's importance, put on his hat and strode off to Regent Street, wondering when he should be rich enough to subscribe to a club and have horses and servants and be independent of everybody; for, in the length and breadth of England, there was not a prouder, nor more extravagant, nor more ridiculous young fellow than clever, thoughtless, good-natured Malcolm Frazer, late of H. M. S. Sunflower, who had a remarkably tenacious memory concerning his Highland ancestors, and an equally remarkable facility for forgetting that his mother had been simply the daughter of a business man, who made a deal of money—nobody knew how—and spent it in the same manner, and left her nothing.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

MALCOLM FRAZER was quite correct in his supposition that Miss Caldera was the cause of the sage advice Mina had been pleased to give him; and had his own reason not told him there was some sense in it, he would have valued it accordingly.

For it is a fact that Malcolm, so good-natured, and Miss Caldera, so prudent, could not, for some sufficient cause, contrive to "get on together;" and for every little disagreement which Mina and she were wont to have, he and she had fifty.

The truth was, Malcolm provoked her; she could have overlooked his extravagance, thoughtlessness, and rashness,—she had felt half inclined to pity him when she heard he was coming home in disgrace; but when he did actually swagger into the drawing-room with just the same careless, unabashed manner as formerly; when his laugh sounded as joyous as

ever; when he and his mother sneered at business and called it low; when he never offered to settle down steadily at home, and become a useful member of society, and go each morning off to the place below the Tower where his uncle "turned over" no end of thousands of sovereigns in the year; and when he mysteriously hinted how, in a little time, he would "get round" Uncle John and coax him into doing a little more for him yet, the worthy lady's patience became exhausted, and she confidentially told Mina she thought her brother was "a ridiculous idiot."

They disagreed, whenever they met, on every conceivable point,—religion, politics, the news of the day, dress, education, music, books, amusements: these topics furnished them incessantly with occasions for what Malcolm styled, "little tiffs;" and he so enjoyed putting the worthy governess out of temper, that he frequently said precisely the opposite of what he thought, that Miss Caldera might be thus innocently trapped into an argument, which furnished him with opportunities for laughing at her.

The theme matrimonial was, however, the grand battle-ground on which the two delighted to fling decided opinions at each other's heads; for Miss Cal-

dera, with all her sense, was one of those people who appear to imagine the feminine portion of the creation have been sent on the earth for no other purpose save to marry: and, to superficial observers, it really seemed as if she had remained a spinster solely from a philanthropic desire to have more time at her disposal to assist her fellow mortals to fulfil their destinies in this particular.

Original sense and later experiences were perpetually battling together in her mind, and she strove so hard to persuade herself and all whom it might concern that a "good settlement" was the great prize on which, from infancy, a female ought to fix her eyes, that she talked her theoretical set of opinions at every mortal who dared her to contradiction, with a pertinacity which ought, at least, to have convinced her own mind of the truth of her perpetual assertion, "That the only thing a woman can and ought to do to help herself, is to marry."

But in vain: a few obstinate and primitive ideas, which she had collected amidst the roses of her mother's flower-garden and the Latin books of her father's library, that woman may think of something else during her progress through this world than "catching" a husband, would keep springing up in her rebellious heart; and, though she strove hard

to root up these absurdities, all her endeavours were but of very little use, for the new views which intercourse with the world had taught her did not satisfy her as to the "rightness" of the match-making system, though they did as to its utility; and, when she got fairly bewildered, between feeling and what she was pleased to term reason, she settled the point by repeating, for the thousandth time, there was something wrong about women's position, but as they were so situated, the best thing they could do, individually and collectively, was to marry, though she could not avoid confessing to herself that it was a great pity the eternal necessity should be always driving mothers and daughters along in an everlasting search after elder sons and wealthy partners.

Some specimens of the "fine old English gentleman" are still to be met with in rural districts, who assert that fox-hunting is the noblest pursuit which can employ the faculties of man; and really to have heard Miss Caldera converse, it might occasionally have been imagined she thought husband-hunting the grandest chase that could by possibility occupy the mind of woman, and her knowledge of the difficulties and troubles besetting every step of a female's life had made her think it, as she said, "a very necessary chase," though, to do her justice, she

never could so far get over some of her original ideas as to feel that a marriage without affection is preferable to labouring solitarily for daily bread, or that any amount of hundreds or thousands per annum could have induced her, even though so weary of her situation, to take, for better, for worse, one whom she could not respect and love.

The perpetual warfare which went on in her mind, between feeling and desirability, produced many rather contradictory results; amongst others, the anomaly that she, a spinster governess, who was constantly urging on all with whom she came in contact to "fulfil their destinies," had refused, since she came to London, what her cousin, the school-mistress, had been pleased to term, a most "eligible offer," from a rich, vulgar, dinner-loving *parvenu* (who wanted a wife as a housekeeper, and thought Miss Caldera would just suit), simply because she retained an old-fashioned prejudice (spite of her new-fashioned convictions) that she should not care to wed a person she disliked: and no doubt she was very foolish to reject a home for such a slight reason. And she thought so herself; but she could not overcome the prejudice, and so remained single to give capital advice to other people, which she did not approve sufficiently to follow herself.

Then again, until any girl amongst her limited circle of acquaintances was "settled," she gave her rest neither by day nor night till she tacked "Mrs." to a new name; told her, if she chanced to be so self-willed and unworldly as to refuse an apparently eligible offer, that "she had thrown good fortune from her," and "wished she might ever get such a proposal again;" and finally, after she had, in conjunction with friends and relatives, moved heaven and earth to get her to tie herself for life to some rich dunce or genteel spendthrift, she turned the tables, and commenced grumbling "how that misguided child had thrown herself away, and what a wretched lot she had thought proper to select for herself."

Many reasons induced her to desire that Mina should marry Mr. Westwood: first, she liked him, and thought there was no cause to fear its proving an unhappy union; secondly, that gentleman had been at great pains to convince her that Mina's chance of fortune from her uncle was by no means certain; that he might choose a wife for himself; that he might quarrel with Malcolm, who was a most provoking young fellow; that he might even fail; that a thousand reverses might arise to blast her prospects; that, in fact, her only hope of a tran-

quil existence was changing her Scotch name for his English one; and his hints to Miss Caldera had grown so alarmingly strong after Malcolm's finishing exploit, that at length the worthy governess became a sight perfectly dreaded by Mina, who was half frightened by the pictures of poverty occasionally presented for her contemplation, but who was wholly determined to have her own way, spite of the combined efforts of the entire universe, always supposing she could manage to get it.

On the Sunday previous to the dialogue between Malcolm and his sister, it had chanced that Mr. Alfred Westwood, instead of walking peaceably home from church to his house in Belerma Square, turned his steps in an opposite direction, and proceeded to that tenanted by Miss Caldera and her cousin, both of whom he encountered on the pipe-clayed steps.

"Could you favour me with five minutes' private conversation," he said, on the strength of which point blank hint, the strong-minded schoolmistress, who had somehow come to the conclusion that the earth would be too happy if fine gentlemen and bold children were not permitted to spoil the face of it, stalked majestically off, setting down vanity, perfumes, rings, hair oil, and rudeness, as amongst the

sins which did most easily beset Mr. Alfred Westwood, and had gained immense possession over him.

"Miss Caldera," began that individual, who could speak perfectly straightforwardly when he chose to do so, "will you try to bring Mina to reason. I want to marry her, and settle the business without delay."

"You ought to try yourself," replied the lady, who was pretty nearly weary of her fruitless endeavours.

"I have, till I am tired," he answered; "but I have now more pressing reasons than ever: if you will use your best influence, you shall never have cause to repent; if she marry me I will make her happy—on my soul I will; her uncle's consent is certain, will you try to gain her's?"

"She does not seem to care very much for you; that is the difficult part of the business," said Miss Caldera.

"But it is her *interest* to care for me," retorted Mr. Westwood, "and if you point that out to her, the rest is easy; no woman is insensible to that."

The *esprit de corps* brought a flush into the lady's pale cheek as she answered warmly,

"Interest is the *last* thing woman does look to in any relation of life, and no mortal ever thought less

of worldly advancement than Mina Frazer; faults she has,—too many, perhaps, for her own happiness, —but a mercenary spirit is not one of them; I could not care for her as I do if she were sordid and calculating; neither could you."

Mr. Westwood smiled as he replied,

"Perhaps not," but it was not a pleasant smile; in truth, he had about as much opinion of women as of men, and that was none: but he had a strange sort of attachment for Mina; a dim unacknowledged idea that there was some kind of good in her, although at the same time he thought she refused him, not because she was blind to his fascinations—that being impossible—but because she expected to be a great heiress, and to marry, perhaps, in time, a pauper lord. He saw the pride and folly of both mother and son, and concluded that underneath Mina's reserve, pride as great, and folly nearly as ridiculous, were resolutely lurking; therefore, he imagined if she thought herself likely to be poor, she would accept him, and that was all he wanted her to do; he would manage all the rest quietly and dexterously himself. In this endeavour, who so likely to aid him as Miss Caldera, his staunch friend and ally? wherefore he had come to her, and so, instead of treating her to his opinion of the entire

feminine sex, he said, in answer to her rather angry speech, the two words previously recorded,

"Perhaps not."

"I am sure not," responded the governess earnestly.

Mr. Westwood laughed.

"I wish," he said, "you would find some means to make her care for me; believe me she had better."

There was a significance in the tone of the latter portion of the sentence that struck Miss Caldera so much as to cause her to inquire what he meant.

"That it will be well with mother, brother, and sister if she do; that it will be worse for all if she do not," was the rejoinder.

"You do not wish me to understand that, even if Mina persist in her refusal, you would be so ungenerous as to endeavour to turn Mr. Merapie's heart against them," she said, hurriedly.

"Heaven forbid!" replied Mr. Westwood; "but in the one case I should use all my influence to advance their interests, and in the other I should merely let matters take their course, without interfering. I don't pretend to Quixotism, Miss Caldera: if she marry me, I will do her and her's good;

if not, I would not stir ten paces out of my way to serve her; she had better consider fifty times before she says 'no.'"

"But do you mean to imply that Mr. Merapie takes Malcolm's breach of discipline in such an angry spirit that he will never forgive it,—that the silly boy has endangered, not merely his own prospects but those of his sister?" she inquired in surprise. "I think you must be mistaken. I can scarcely believe that he will ever forget to provide for Mina, at all events."

"I neither imply nor ask you to believe anything," said Mr. Westwood deliberately; "but I say what I *know*, that he is greatly grieved about his nephew, and perplexed and tormented about other matters; that Mina Frazer's fortune won't be the one half what I once thought it would be, and what she, I suppose, thinks it is certain to be; and, finally, I know she had better marry me, and I want you to try and persuade her to do it: if she does not have her fortune settled now, she may never have any."

There was a something almost triumphant in the tone in which these words were spoken, and Miss Caldera felt a vague alarm steal over her as she asked,

"But why do you say so; *why* is she less likely

to be wealthy a few years hence than now? Why are you in such haste to have matters arranged?"

"Because life is always uncertain, and business is even more so; because, in ten words, 'it is well to strike while the iron is hot,'" was his brief reply.

Miss Caldera sat and looked at him as if she thought more knowledge might be gained from any feature in his face than from his mouth; but he returned her gaze with such an unmoved expression of countenance, that at last she withdrew her eyes with a vexed and puzzled air: then he, with a smile, arose to depart.

"I am not jesting," he remarked, by way of a departing hint.

"I see you are not," she answered.

"And I trust to your friendship and good sense," he added.

"I suppose," began Miss Caldera, "it would be useless to ask you any questions on the subject, for——"

"For, although it is impolite not to answer any questions a lady may propound, you think, in this instance, I should feel inclined to do so," he interposed, resuming his usual manner, and laughing so as to display the whiteness of his regular teeth. "No, no, please not to place me in such a disagree-

able position, because I cannot tell even you; and indeed I should not like to refuse. I have said, perhaps, even more than I ought, but I rely implicitly on your discretion."

And Mr. Westwood, who was evidently most anxious to get out of the house, shook hands quite vehemently with the governess and departed, leaving her, for the first time since she had seen his clever handsome face, a little dissatisfied with the possessor of it.

For a few minutes she actually wondered if Mina were not right, if a marriage between the shrewd, calculating, middle-aged man and the impetuous, generous, passionate, self-willed girl, were likely to produce happiness; and then Miss Caldera "pshawed" down the thought, and decided that, if there were the least risk of Mina ever being poor, she ought to wed Mr. Westwood at once, who was just as good as most men, and far better than many.

All that night Miss Caldera strove to convince herself Mr. Westwood had been merely threatening or scheming; but there was truth in the tone of his voice as it sounded again and again in her ears. She began to form a fixed idea that something was wrong, and, on the full strength of this conviction, she went over to Belerma Square the following

afternoon, and had a long earnest talk with Mina, the result of which talk was, that her former charge got, as usual, into a passion, and, going a step further than was her wont, declared that "she would submit to this persecution no longer; that marry Mr. Westwood she would not; that she had no present intention of wedding any one; and that, finally, she was mistress of her own actions and intended to remain so, and that she wished Miss Caldera would not interfere with her again."

Then the governess, who, though sensitive to a look from most people, knew Mina's love for her so well as never to feel offended even at her angriest expressions, put her arms around the girl's waist, and, even though Mina strove to push her away, besought her, for the sake of former times, to listen to her. And then she told her old pupil all that Mina subsequently repeated to her brother, and a great deal more besides—which brought tears into the rebellious eyes and a swelling into the wilful heart—about how earnestly she desired her happiness, and of what an interest she had taken in her from the first day, and how she had loved the pale slight child at the beginning, solely because of the vehement love she had evinced for the land of her birth and the people who dwelt there.

"You may be angry or not, Mina," the faithful friend said at length, "but so long as I speak to you, I will say just what I think; for many reasons, I believe you are wrong to be so stiff towards Mr. Westwood, who is so fond of you. Mina, for my sake, will you reflect on all I have said?"

"Good gracious!" said the girl, squeezing back, after her determined fashion, a tear that almost trembled on her eyelashes, "good gracious! you have made me think about Mr. Westwood and 'marrying and giving in marriage' till I am sick of the theme, and the conclusion I long ago arrived at, Malcolm, you remember, put into words for me the other day. He said, men considered matrimony, when they reflected upon it at all, as a thing which might come, not as women did, as a thing which must come; that it is one incident in the drama of men's lives, but forms the entire plot in the drama of ours; that, if you would let me think of it as of an event which, if it suited, was well, and if it did not, why well still,—it would be better and happier and more respectable altogether. He says, that's the way he contemplates the step matrimonial, and that he does not see why, simply because I am his sister, I should not view it in the same light."

"Malcolm can push his way in the world, if he

will; he must never be a dependant amongst strangers: he is a man and may struggle; you could not."

"I could," retorted Mina, "but I need not, for my uncle will always provide for me."

"Mina Frazer," said Miss Caldera, laying an earnest hand on her shoulder and looking half sorrowfully into the flushed youthful face, "do not be too sure of that; life's chances and changes are awful to contemplate. I once would have laughed, had any one told me I should ever have to work for my daily bread; but desolation came into my home. You have not the patience or the nature to bear, as it has been my lot imperfectly to do; you would not like to think you would ever be situated as I am; but remember, dear, when reverses come, that, though a woman tenderly trained and matured finds it hard to toil and work, yet that still she must live. I had a father to leave a competence to his only daughter, and yet you know a little of the burden I have borne."

"I am as sure," said Mina, gazing up sadly into the countenance of the weary woman, "I am as sure of Uncle John as I could be of my dear father if he were now alive."

"And still, dear Mina, his love was impotent to

preserve you from beggary; strong it was, I doubt not, but it had not power to keep him alive to guide and love and struggle for you."

There was a pause, and then Mina said in a subdued voice,

"I wish I could do any one thing to show how I love you, except marry that horrid man, indeed I would do it."

"Will you be a little more polite to him then, Mina, and endeavour to get Malcolm to be so too?" implored Miss Caldera.

"I will, just to please you," said the girl; "for you're a dear, kind, steady, provoking old friend, whom I shall never quarrel with for more than an hour at a time so long as I live, never!" And as Mrs. Frazer entered the room at this moment, Mina left it a little sorrowfully and a great deal more thoughtfully than usual.

Indeed she reflected so much on the subject that she resolved to warn her brother at the very first opportunity, and, as we have seen, did warn him; but her words, instead of soothing that young gentleman, only moved his spirit unto irritation, all the greater, perhaps, because he felt them to be true; and he resolved, during the course of his walk, that, instead of speaking to his uncle, as he had intended,

immediately on Mr. Merapie's return from Holland, he would go to Scotland until, as he mentally expressed it, "the storm blew over," and take Mina with him.

"Then," he concluded, as he paced home through Arras Street, in the fading light of a January afternoon, "he will have forgotten all about my unlucky exploit, and I will promise to be his dutiful nephew, and turn out a pattern of obedience and grace and so forth, and he will buy me a commission; and, if Westwood be not 'settled' some way by that time, why of course, when I am more in favour, I can speak with a better chance of success than would be possible at present: that is just what I will do forthwith,—write to Craigmaver and tell Allan and the laird what I want."

And, having sketched out this vague beautiful design, Malcolm Frazer raised his eyes from the slippery pavement and noticed casually, as people do notice such things in London, that a tall gentlemanly looking man was walking slowly and thoughtfully a few steps before him.

"Decidedly an aristocrat," was the result of Malcolm's brief survey, for he had imbibed from his mother, the city merchant's daughter, an idea that fine figures and long pedigrees are inseparable; and,

having arrived at this conclusion, the young Scotchman, who had a love for Aristocrats, second perhaps only to his love for himself, continued to scrutinize the stranger with some interest.

That individual was so much engrossed with his own reflections, that he never noticed one of those slides which, spite of the police, mischievous boys will make for their amusement in quiet streets, and, walking unsuspectingly upon it, down he came; before he was aware he had slipped, he was lying full length on the pavement at Malcolm's feet.

"Halloa!" cried out that young gentleman in true sailor fashion, and "Halloa!" echoed a cabman, who was slowly coming down the narrow street, and who pulled up and jumped off his box to the rescue.

"Knowed he was ill hurt," said he to Malcolm, "by the way I saw his head coming against the ground."

"A deuced ugly business," remarked Malcolm; "his head is cut, and, it seems to me, his arm broken."

"Is he a friend of your's, sir?" inquired a person who now joined the group to render assistance, as the Londoners always do on such occasions with

hearty good will; "the fall has completely stunned him: is he a friend of your's?"

"Never saw him in my life before," was the rejoinder.

"Better put him in the cab, then, and drive without delay to the nearest hospital," suggested a clergyman, standing amidst a knot of passers by and idlers, who had by this time collected to enjoy the excitement.

"Better look in his pocket for an address and take him there," growled out a policeman, coming forward, as if to aid in the search.

"No, no!" cried a doctor; "the hospital's close at hand, drive him there."

"Shall I, sir?" demanded the cabman of Malcolm, to whom he somehow looked for his fare.

"No," said the latter angrily; "stand back," he continued, addressing the crowd generally, and the policeman particularly: "I am a gentleman myself, and I won't submit to see a gentleman's pockets rummaged or himself dragged off to an hospital. I'll take the charge of him on myself: help me to lift him into the cab, driver; so,—now walk your horse very slowly over to number 12, Belerma Square;" and, as he spoke, Malcolm Frazer, who, spite of his absurd speech, would have done the same good turn

for the meanest gillie that ever crossed a Highland moor, and who was possessed of an honest manly heart, and any amount of sailor frankness, entered the vehicle and strove with tenderness and solicitude, such as a woman might have displayed, to prevent the jolting injuring the sufferer, who, at the moment, however, was insensible to everything.

"Now you just be off about your business," said the policeman savagely to a lot of boys who remained looking after the cab with open mouths, "be off about your business, if you have any, and if you haven't, you had best make it one to be moving, or I may make it mine to stir you," which vague threat produced so speedily the desired effect, that in five minutes he found himself pacing along the street utterly alone in his glory.

Mina was standing at one of the drawing-room windows as the cab stopped before the door of number 12; and, when she beheld her brother assisting the driver to lift something wonderfully resembling a human being out of the vehicle, and up the half dozen stone steps, she, moved by that curiosity which her mother Eve had transmitted to her, and also by that pity which every woman feels for the suffering and the afflicted, hastily quitted her post of observation, and ran down into the hall to ascertain

what this new arrival meant, and if anything dreadful had occurred.

"Malcolm, what *is* the matter?" she inquired.

"Don't torment me, Mina," rejoined Malcolm, who, on the strength of being desperately out of breath, and in a profuse perspiration from his late philanthropic labours, felt himself raised on a sort of moral eminence above his sister. "Don't torment me, Mina, but open that door, and send one of the servants over for Dr. Richards, and don't talk, but come and make yourself useful if you can."

And thus fraternally exhorted, Mina—whilst her brother paid the cabman so liberally, as not merely to extort three touches of the hat and two "thank you, sirs" from that individual, but also to cause him to mutter, as he drove off, in confidence to his horse, that he was a gentleman and no mistake, though he lived in such a place — did make herself useful; and truly there was need that she should, since Mrs. Frazer could not bear the sight of a wound, and the housekeeper was, if possible, worse than her mistress, and her assistant was out in quest of a doctor, and Miss Caldera was giving a French lesson some two miles off: there was need that she should.

"Bad case," said the doctor when he entered.

"Not hopeless, though," exclaimed Malcolm.

"Well, no; but he must not be moved again: pity you had not carried him upstairs at once."

"There is no necessity," interposed Mina; "a bed can be made up here."

"Let it be done then," said Dr. Richards, one of the briefest and gruffest of his profession; but as Mina left the room to obey his command, he added, nodding approvingly to Malcolm, "always knew she was none of the fainting sort."

And Mina got matters arranged so speedily and satisfactorily, that even the acid man of medicine was moved unto complimenting her; and he turned every mortal out of the room save Malcolm and herself, and made her hold a candle for him whilst he bandaged, and set, and went so rapidly and (Mina thought) so roughly through all sorts of surgical processes, that the girl at last grew quite faint and sick, and would fain have abandoned her post; but the doctor and Malcolm both telling her, though in somewhat various modes, that as she had been sent on the earth she must make herself useful there, she remained at their bidding to do all she could for the sufferer, who, when he was at all restored to consciousness, first groaned in perfect agony, and then inquired,

"Where am I?"

"My dear sir," growled forth Dr. Richards, "will you keep yourself quiet, if you please, and not speak a single word;" an injunction the patient obeyed whilst the pain of his arm kept him mute; but during a moment of ease, he whispered to Mina, who was bathing his forehead with some mixture the doctor had given her,

"Do tell me what place this is?"

"My uncle's," said the girl, in a voice which convinced him, more than fifty assurances could have done, that he was amongst those who are to be found in all climes and countries and ranks and classes; amongst those who enhance the pleasure of life, and soften its bitterness; amongst those of whom we meet a few everywhere, and part from mournfully, and greet joyfully, and call with thankful trusting hearts—friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

ERNEST BEGINS TO SEE THE VALUE OF LIFE.

THREE weeks after the occurrences narrated in the last chapter, Ernest Ivraine, his right arm in a sling and his face paler and thinner than ever, ascended the broad staircase of Mr. Merapie's house with the air of one who found even that slight exertion an immense trouble; and, in truth, so he did, for he was still weak and suffering.

For many days previously, indeed, he had been permitted by Dr. Richards to cross the hall and exchange his own chamber for the more cheerful dining-room; but now, for the first time, he was essaying the bold step of reaching the apartment on which Mrs. Frazer had set the stamp of her taste, and he felt fatigued accordingly.

He marvelled how completely a few short weeks had prostrated him, and it seemed as if, until then, he had never felt half so forcibly how extraordinary

it was that he should be now, after a fashion, domesticated with people of whose very names he had a month previously been ignorant; of whom he still knew literally nothing; who were utter strangers to him, but who had, notwithstanding, nursed and watched and tended and cared for him, as though he had been a near and dear relative; who had been kinder to him than any friend he possessed in the world, save Henry, would have been, and whose attention had in all human probability been, under Providence, the means of saving his life.

Life! Was the prolongation of existence, then, a boon for which he ought to thank them?

Ernest smiled bitterly as he opened the drawing-room door and entered the apartment, which, being tenantless, he felt he was at perfect liberty to make himself thoroughly comfortable in, and, accordingly, he took possession of one of the ancient sofas Mrs. Frazer had got "done up" in damask, and modernized, soon after her arrival in Belerma Square, and stretching his weary person at full length upon it, he began musing *à loisir* on the events of the last three weeks.

They might not be many, but they were important: first, there was he, Ernest Ivraine, who for years previously had never known any ailment,

—save that common one, the heartache,—a languid listless invalid, who found it a trouble to raise even his uninjured arm to his head, which would, in spite of his own inclinations and Dr. Richard's unremitting exertions, keep everlastingly tormenting him with harbouring a dull, ceaseless, throbbing sort of pain, which unfitted him for the slightest labour of any kind, and made him feel moping and indolent, in spite of various efforts to rouse himself and try to be, as he occasionally said to Malcolm Frazer, "a man again."

Then, in the next place, he, the eldest son of a miserly Lincolnshire baronet, had formed a sort of friendship for a wild careless boy, who introduced himself as the descendant of a perfect swarm of old Highlanders, with all sorts of heathenish and unpronounceable Christian names, which Highlanders, it seemed, from Malcolm's account, had been great in the land before Ben Nevis was heard of; and he knew, by something more conclusive than the young Scotchman's vague ancestral assertions, that he was a guest in the house of Malcolm's English uncle, who resided in a very unfashionable gloomy part of London, who was a merchant, reported to be immensely rich, and whom he had not yet seen, in consequence of his protracted absence upon im-

portant business in the flat, rich, marshy land of Holland.

And if the "events" had finished here, none of them need ever have been chronicled, for broken arms will knit, and broken heads will mend, and strength will return, and the pulse, after a temporary weakness, will throb rapidly as it was wont to do; and the friendship he felt for Malcolm was neither so deep nor so intense as to make the prospect of a speedy parting appear perfectly unendurable to him; and he felt he could say farewell to Mrs. Frazer and Miss Caldera without a faltering tone; and as to the house itself, why it was a vast deal more comfortable than Paradise, the furniture and appointments being twice as good, and the style of living and so forth infinitely better: but then he did not expect the owner of it to leave him anything, and he fully anticipated the inhabitants of his father's abode would bequeath sufficient to render him and Henry independent for ever of the smiles or frowns of fortune. But Ernest Ivraine knew something more had happened during the course of those three weeks than illness of body, the making of friends, or the growth of the, to him, hitherto unexperienced sensation that ties half the world together one day in bonds which, alas! for human

nature, snap asunder too frequently the next—gratitude.

The melancholy man closed his weary eyelids and sunk hopelessly back as he reluctantly admitted the miserable truth that he had commenced to care for something besides Henry, his brother; that he had made but one rapid stride from freedom of heart to sorrow of soul; that a new care, a fresh trial had been created for him by the pale slight girl, who had nursed and watched him like a sister during his illness, and scarcely spoken ten words to him during his convalescence; who, least of all in the house, obtruded herself on his notice or sought to drag him out from the armour of silent reserve, in which, for years, it had been his pleasure habitually to encase himself; who seemed pining to be away from that dreary Square, just as Henry had pined to leave Paradise; and who, if not handsome, or striking, or fascinating, had a mild beautiful pair of eyes that might have pleased any one, and a look of sad, earnest thought in her face, which interested the baronet's son more than the gayest, brightest expression of a happy woman could have done. For though a glad kind glance might, for a moment, have won an answering smile from Ernest, still the smile would have faded from his lips the next, leav-

ing no more trace behind in his soul than that left by a chance sunbeam on the surface of some darksome river, whilst the look that dwelt almost continually in Mina's face had become part of his thoughts, and having, by some means, found an entrance, it remained in his heart, for nothing that once took silent possession of that gloomy citadel, whether good or evil, pleasant or disagreeable, could ever afterwards be completely eradicated therefrom.

His feelings, affections, hates, grew to be as much portions of himself as the blood in his veins, which had been half stagnated during his long residence at Paradise. Though he was so weak and ill, it seemed to Ernest, at times, as if the stream of life circulated more freely through his frame in the more wholesome London atmosphere than it had been wont to do amongst the swamps of "home;" and even whilst he mourned over it, he could not conceal from himself the fact that a better feeling than love of gold, or the craving, sickening desire for a father's death, had got possession of him, — love, yea, verily love, for Mina Frazer.

Ernest Ivraine felt himself constrained to care for her, and though he told his rebellious heart that she was not and could never be anything to him, still his heart declined to believe the assertion. Where-

fore, Mina, all unconsciously, retained her place there, and the baronet's son mourned because of the fresh trouble that had fallen upon him.

"Your sister does not seem very strong," he had remarked one day to Malcolm; and the answer which was returned to this observation pained him more than he would have cared to acknowledge.

"No," said Malcolm, who always liked to speak of his "clan," "she pines and sickens for home and a sight of our relatives there. The English air has never suited her nor never will; her body is here and her heart there: but whenever my uncle returns, I intend to go myself and take her to the Highlands."

"Not to remain for a permanency, though?" exclaimed Ernest hastily; then added more quietly, "Mrs. Frazer could scarcely do without her."

"And me," supplied the youth, pulling up his shirt collar with a self-satisfied air, which proved to Ernest he knew he should be the most missed. "Oh, no! not for a permanency, at least, not at present; when I am older and have seen a little more of the world and feel tired of excitement and that sort of thing, I shall probably settle there, buy an estate (where I hope you 'll come and shoot), and be, like my uncle, a small sovereign in some remote High-

land principality; but just now, you see, I am rather in the 'black books' here, and want to be out of sight of St. Paul's till the fog clears away. And Mina, poor child! I have not yet told her of my intention, but she will be wild with delight at the prospect of seeing Craigmaver once more. She was quite young when she left it; but it has been what novelists call 'an enduring thought' with her ever since."

What could he, the silent, melancholy, Lincolnshire misanthrope ever be to Mina Frazer, the rich city merchant's niece, with her Highland partialities and prejudices, her old strong attachments, her unconquerable dislike to her mother's country, her wild yearning for the hills and the moors and the mountains of her beautiful fatherland! What had he, whose eyes were weary with gazing over fens and swamps and flat low fields, to do with one who had in childhood looked on the bold scenery of her birthplace till she had come to claim affinity with it, and to feel that it was a sort of living death to dwell far from rushing waterfalls and spreading lakes and rocks and caves and glens! Why should he, whose relatives were so sordid and mean and calculating, even think of her who had spent the most impressionable part of life amongst those whose hearts were

pure and fresh and free as the wind that wandered over the heath-clad hills! He was nothing—could be nothing to her, Ernest Ivraine constantly reflected; and yet, with a sort of soul sickness, he found day by day that she was growing to be much to him.

Too much—a being to remember, to carry a sad memory back to Paradise, to dream of in after days, to long to see, to marvel concerning. She would return to the Highlands with Malcolm, ay, and stay there, probably, and lose the melancholy expression which had first attracted him to her: in time she would marry, perhaps, and be mistress of some lovely Scottish home, whilst he remained for ever moping and pining amid the dreary swamps surrounding the ancient gloomy brick pile he had called, since infancy, "home."

"I ought to go," Ernest murmured, half aloud, as the whole truth dawned upon him; and he raised himself on one elbow and looked hopelessly at the window, as if beyond it lay freedom from care, as though through it he proposed making his final exit, —"I ought to go."

Perhaps, indeed, for one moment he actually thought of doing so, but exhausted nature laid a detaining hand upon him, obscured his eyes with a

sort of semi-darkness, and once again Ernest sunk back on the sofa, feeling that something stronger than his will—stern necessity, to wit—kept him a not reluctant captive in that house.

Then, when the temporary exitement had passed away, and the sort of calm that great weakness always induces had succeeded thereto, the invalid became conscious that there were persons in the adjoining apartment speaking eagerly and hurriedly together.

There were only folding doors separating Ernest from them—folding doors but imperfectly shut—and the last few sentences of the conversation being uttered in rather a high key, its purport flashed instantly across his mind. He was no eavesdropper, was too honourable to wish to hear what was not intended to reach his ears; but almost ere he had time to comprehend the interview was a private one, it had concluded and the talkers stood beside him.

"I gave you a decided answer once before," was the first hurried sentence he heard, "and I wish you clearly to understand that my present is a final one."

"So be it," answered Mr. Westwood bitterly; "believe me, I should be glad to help you to a grander or a better match."

"You are too kind," said Mina, with something wonderfully resembling a sneer; and, pushing open the doors as she uttered these words in an irritated tone, she beheld Mr. Ivraine, who had, perhaps, never during the whole course of his life felt himself placed in such an unpleasant position before.

"I hope you feel better, sir," said Mr. Westwood, who, having noticed Mina's sudden start as she crossed the threshold of the two rooms, had followed her in, and now stood the only apparently unembarrassed person present. "I hope you feel better."

"A great deal, thank you," answered Ernest, a very poor apology for a smile flickering over his grave face; "still a little weak, but I shall get over that in a day or two."

"Hope to see you quite well again in a short time," said Mr. Merapie's partner, with quite an air of interest; "but you have been most dangerously ill, and these things are not to be shaken off all at once. I suppose I can do nothing for you in the city. Oh! Mina, I quite forgot what I came in especially to say to Mrs. Frazer, but will you be kind enough to tell her I had a letter from your uncle this morning, and he expects to be home to-morrow or the day after."

"Confound your impudence," thought Ernest, a sort of tingling sensation pervading the fingers of even his right hand, as the above sentence smote on his ear; whilst Mina, looking angrily into Mr. Westwood's face, answered briefly "I will;" and, apparently, not in the least ruffled or disconcerted by what had occurred, the *ci-devant* clerk bowed to the invalid, and hastened off to the office of "Merapie and Westwood," vowing all sorts of vengeance against his insensible "ladye love," and wishing, for no very good reason, excepting, perhaps, because he was thoroughly out of temper, that "that dark proud Lincolnshire squire had been 'finished' instead of cured by gruff little Dr. Richards," who declared the baronet's son had a constitution like a lion, which would stand the wear and tear of a thousand years; a declaration Ernest had almost groaned over, as he reflected that it was from his father's side of the house he inherited "this incapability of being killed."

There was an awkward pause for a moment after Mr. Westwood left the room, during which Mina looked at the carpet, and the invalid at her; but before he had time to recover sufficiently from his embarrassment to frame a sentence, or utter a single commonplace observation, the post brought relief

to both, in the shape of an imposing looking packet directed to Ernest Ivraine, Esq., and bearing unmistakeable signs indicating that it had travelled far over the sea, over the land through many countries, from India to the former home of its writer, England.

"I will leave you to read it," said Mina, noticing how eagerly he clutched the missive; and thankful to get away, even for a few minutes, she hurried out of the apartment, and proceeded more slowly to her mother's chamber, to inform the much enduring lady that their visitor was at length able to come upstairs, and had actually accomplished the bold undertaking.

"Well, my dear, I shall be down to see him directly," said Mrs. Frazer, coughing in a genteel manner, which clearly proved she was suffering from influenza. "What in the world, child, makes you look so pale?" she added, gazing languidly at Mina from beneath the lace borders of a most ladylike and becoming morning cap; "I never was pale at your age; I 'm sure I am not so even now;" and the widow glanced complacently at the mirror, as was her wont whenever she had a convenient opportunity of admiring herself, whilst Mina answered,

"I am always pale, you know, mamma, and besides, I do not feel well, which I suppose makes me

be paler than usual; I have not been strong for a good while past."

It was about the first time in her life the girl had ever complained of bodily illness, and, perhaps, it was this fact which induced her mother to gaze at her for a moment ere she responded,

"Ill! yes, that 's just what Malcolm was saying this morning, and he wants me to let you go to Craigmaver with him for a little, when I am better, and your uncle returns; but I really do not see how you can leave me."

Mina stretched out both hands imploringly to her mother, as she cried,

"To Craigmaver! oh! let me go, do, pray let me. The air of the Highlands will give me new life; I feel almost as if I should die of excess of joy to see that place once more. I am sure Malcolm would not like to be there without me; won't you let me go with him."

"What a strange unaccountable being you are, Mina," said her mother, with a puzzled and but ill-satisfied air; "I cannot conceive why you should like that horrid place, miles and miles from a town, where there is nothing to see or hear or buy, and nobody to speak to. It is not natural at your age: I do not understand you, I confess."

"Nothing to see!" echoed Mina, and then the long pent-up loves and longings of her soul burst forth, and fell on the ear of one who could not understand her, and who had never done so. "Nothing to see! oh! mother, think of this, and then of that; think of the hills and the heather and the pines and the free pure air; think of the garden at Craigmaver, filled with flowers and birds and perfumes, where, even in winter, the sun seemed always shining; think of the view down into the silent dark little lake, and of the valleys beyond, and the mountains rising above, peak upon peak, till, in the distance, they seemed to meet the sky, and become lost in heaven; think of the moors where the bees swarmed in myriads; where the scent of wild thyme filled the air, and the eye grew almost tired of the gorgeousness of the purple carpet; where for miles and miles there was no human habitation, no road, scarcely a path, but over which one never got weary of roaming. Nothing to hear! when I was a child, papa and I used to sit down on some old grey stone and listen for hours to the chirping of the grasshoppers and the scream of the eagle, and the dashing of distant waterfalls and the murmuring of nearer streams. Oh! the land that he loved, where he is buried, is dearer to me than any other could ever

become; and when, besides all this, I think of seeing my kind old uncle, and Allan and Saunders and all the people who knew my father as a boy, and love his children for the sake of the dead,—I feel as if my heart would break with joy—as if I should never live to meet them all again."

A colour had come up into the usually pallid cheek during the progress of this rapid sentence, and the dark eyes were moistened with tears when Mina concluded.

"You are just your father over again, child," said Mrs. Frazer, and the widow sighed deeply as she made this announcement, evidently considering Mina's likeness to her late husband a dreadful misfortune.

"But I may go with Malcolm?" persisted Mina, a wild joy and a great fear contending for mastery in her bosom; "may I not, mamma?"

"I do not know, I cannot say," answered Mrs. Frazer, vaguely, who possibly might have more speedily acceded to the request had her daughter not been so extremely anxious for it to be granted; "we can see about it when your uncle comes home."

"He is to be here to-morrow or the day after," said Mina.

"I 'm sure I am thankful to hear it, for the responsibility of being alone in the house with that poor invalid I have felt to be most dreadful; indeed it has been decidedly injurious to my health," said the widow, who had let her sympathy for Ernest evaporate in words since the first evening her son carried him into the breakfast-parlour, until now, when he sate alone in the drawing-room; "and, Mina, you had better go down stairs again and give him my compliments and say how glad I am to hear he is so much stronger, and that I hope to see him presently;" in compliance with which maternal injunction the girl descended the stairs and re-entered the apartment where she had left Mr. Ivraine, and where she now found him, sitting with an open letter in his hand, and an expression of such pain on his face, as caused her almost involuntarily to demand if he were ill.

He started at her words, and hastily crumpling up the papers, answered "no," so abruptly, that Mina, fearing she had annoyed him, asked no further question, but, drawing an embroidery frame near to her, commenced working without delivering her mother's message.

She could not understand Mr. Ivraine; she had felt very sorry for him, and done all that lay in her

power to soothe his sufferings and restore him to health; and, at first, when weak and almost helpless, he was lying on the sofa in the dining-room, it had seemed as if they were likely to "get on" well enough; but one unhappy day he repelled her most unintentionally, but still most completely, and Mina never recovered a shock of the kind. Thus it came to pass:

Mrs. Frazer and her daughter were sitting, out of compliment to their guest, in the apartment where John Merapie had been wont to take a comfortable sleep after his dinner and port wine, the widow entertaining the invalid with some of the latest fashionable intelligence, which she thought might prove at once interesting and amusing, when, during one of the lulls in her sensible conversation, Mr. Ivraine turned to Mina, who had sat mute as a statue for fully twenty minutes, and asked if she would be so kind as to write a letter to his father for him.

"You see," he added, glancing at his arm, "it is a duty I am unable to perform myself."

Most truthfully Mina answered that she would be very glad, and, immediately producing writing materials, she drew a chair and table near to the sofa and sat for a minute or two waiting, with a pen in her hand, ready to write down whatever he might

choose to dictate. But, after a puzzled pause, Ernest, a very curious expression flitting over his countenance as he spoke, said,

"I believe, Miss Frazer, I shall not trouble you; perhaps your brother would write it for me instead."

He never added a single syllable of explanation, and Mina felt hurt and mortified. Why she felt so, she did not exactly know; but the effect produced by the simple sentence was such that, whilst Malcolm and Mrs. Frazer, and even Miss Caldera, grew to like the stranger, and he, in his turn, came to converse freely and easily with them, they two scarcely spoke to each other ten times in the course of the day, for she fancied he was proud and stern; and he, imagining she could care for nothing which was not an importation direct from Scotland, knowing his own position, and feeling, moreover, how dangerously large a portion of his thoughts she occupied, sedulously avoided much association with, and kept away from her, as men of strong minds do keep away from things and people whom, even whilst they long to be near, they dread for their own peace sake becoming very dear to them.

And so Mina could not understand the silent uncommunicative man, and thinking, therefore, he did not wish to be interrupted in his meditations, she

bent her head over her work, and, as the rapid needle sped on its course, she gave herself up to pleasant imaginings, concerning her visit to the North and meetings and greetings with the never-to-be-forgotten friends who dwelt there.

Meanwhile, Ernest Ivraine, a blacker and sadder shadow than ever darkening his brow, sat watching her; for the first time in his life, a doubt of the prudence of his choice, years before, occurred to him; for the hundredth time, he felt the galling slavery of his position unendurable: he was sickening for liberty to act as he listed, to speak as his heart prompted him. For the moment he almost desired to cast Paradise and the golden shackles that bound him to it and drew him reluctantly back there, from his soul, and to rush forth hopeful and self-reliant, as Henry had done, into the world.

For, without his aid, Henry had succeeded; the brave heart and the strong arm had triumphed and brought to their honest manly possessor fame, station, comparative wealth, at last.

There lay the letter before him, scarcely legible with the glad high words of fulfilled hope, of thankful rejoicing, with inducements to his brother to come and do likewise, with sentences of affection and dreams of still higher fortune; there it lay, and

there also lay the money Henry did not now require to aid him in his ascent, and Ernest gazed alternately at them and Mina.

It is easier—oh, woe for the soul of man!—easier by far to weep with those who weep than to rejoice with those who rejoice: easier to clasp the hand of a friend in sorrowful sympathy than to wring it in cordial congratulation; for grief is so perpetual a visitor to the hearts of most, that its advent to that of another only seems to draw the chords of attachment closer, and to cause the same mournful melody to vibrate in greater unison, whilst—so contradictory is human nature that a throb of joy, agitating the bosom of one even dearly loved, nineteen times out of twenty causes a sensation of pain to distract, for an instant, the peace of the other.

Ernest Ivraine had suffered and sorrowed for and with Henry; with all the intensity of his nature he loved his brother; he had longed for him to be great and respected and fortunate; and yet now, when success flung her bright smiles on the path of the younger brother and threw a sort of sunshiny track far away into the future for him, Ernest's first feeling was regret, not that Henry was happy, but that his own lot was not equally so.

"Good heavens!" he thought, "what a wretch

dwelling amongst swamps must have made me, when I do not feel my heart bound with triumph to hear Henry is climbing at last, and without my assistance." And Ernest crumpled up the letter, and strove to put it and the rebellious feeling aside, whilst he talked to her who was the cause of the latter, for she had made him wish and thirst for liberty and success, as he had never previously done for aught save gold.

"Miss Frazer," he began, and the strong effort he was making to master his emotions made him seem a little graver and sterner than ever: "Miss Frazer, I believe I soon must leave this house, where I have received so much kindness and——"

"Oh, no!" interrupted Mina, looking up with a happier look in her face than Ernest had ever seen there before—she had been thinking of sunshine on the Scottish hills, but he did not know that;—"oh, no! Dr. Richards said you were not to attempt to move till you were quite strong again."

"But I am much better now, thank God!" said Ernest, and I feel I cannot intrude any longer. Mr. Merapie——"

"Will be delighted for you to stay till it is quite safe for you to travel, at any rate," once more interposed Mina. "We have all regretted not being

able to make you more comfortable," she added in a slightly hesitating tone; "this place is so dreary and stupid, it is not good for an invalid."

Ernest mentally reflected, it was a sort of heaven in comparison with his own home, and sighed as he did so.

"Then you do not like Belerma Square?" he said, after a moment's pause.

"No," briefly responded Mina; and the "No" was, as Malcolm would have in some cases approved, decided.

"Nor London?" proceeded Ernest.

"Nor London," she acquiesced.

"Nor England?" he inquired, by way of a finale.

A sort of perplexed look came over the girl's face for an instant, but then she frankly replied,

"It would not be exactly polite for me to say to you that I dislike England, particularly as I know so little of it; I am not very fond of your country, it is true, but I might like it better if I did not love my own so much."

"Then you would not desire to pass your life here?"

"Here! no!" she responded. "I wish my uncle would retire and buy an estate in the Highlands, but he thinks no place is so pleasant as London, and

I could not bear to be always away from him now: that is the worst of removals, one cannot carry every friend one makes away, nor collect every desirable thing together: those are the happiest who live and die and remain always in the one spot."

"If they care for that spot," supplied Ernest.

"Every one is fond of the place he was born in," said Mina.

"Some dislike it for that very reason," answered Ernest drily; "but," he added, turning the current of the conversation very abruptly back into the course from whence he himself had diverted it, "I fear your uncle will think my long illness must have completely exhausted your patience, and that my protracted visit has been perfectly unreasonable and unjustifiable."

"When you were unable to go away, whether you would or not," broke forth Malcolm, who had sauntered into the room in time to catch the conclusion of the foregoing sentence. "Ah! you do not know my uncle; he will say bringing you here is the first sensible action he has known me perform for some years past, and he will add, he hopes you will consider this your home until you are well enough to return to a better; and he will ask you if we have taken as good care of you as any one, ex

cepting your own relatives and himself, could have done; and he will regret his absence from London, feeling quite sure he could have made you twice as comfortable as his scapegrace of a nephew has endeavoured to do; and he will think that, on the whole, I am not so bad as he thought me before his departure for Holland. And Mina and I will set off to the Highlands early in the spring, leaving him as well pleased with us as ever he was; and I shall look out for a fine site for the house I mean to build when I get on into middle life, of which Mina is to be mistress, and where we shall be delighted to see you whenever you travel north."

Having concluded which safe and hospitable invitation to his Scottish *chateau en espagne*, Malcolm Frazer sank down lazily into an easy chair, whilst Ernest, to whom the cause of Mina's unwonted cheerfulness and communicativeness was now no longer an enigma, mournfully thought of the place where he should be dwelling when they were wandering over Highland mountains; and his heart grew faint and sick as he did so.

CHAPTER XV.

A DISCOVERY.

MALCOLM FRAZER was quite correct when he said his uncle would ask Mr. Ivraine to make his house his home till he was able to journey back to the fens; for, under a rather unpromising exterior, John Merapie possessed a kind and truly English heart, and further, though he was a "city man," who detested and railed at all sorts of "humbug," he felt a little pleased to have for his guest an individual who was not merely the son of a baronet, but who would, if he only lived long enough, appear in due course as a baronet himself.

Then Ernest had no "humbug" about him, was not a bit of a dandy, seemed to understand the value of money, and did not wound the worthy merchant's sensitiveness by the slightest touch of aristocratic *hauteur;* which word, when translated into our vulgar tongue, might frequently be found to mean

underbred impertinence. No; John Merapie found he was a far more sensible agreeable kind of fellow to work with than many a rich business *parvenu* with whom he had occasionally dined, and altogether the Lincolnshire squire and the London quarter-millionaire ran so admirably together along that difficult and dangerous road called daily communication, that Mr. Alfred Westwood grew at length seriously uneasy, and finally felt quite as if an incubus was removed from his spirit when he heard Mr. Ivraine had at last fairly taken his departure, after receiving a cordial invitation from his late host to pay him a visit whenever he was "within twenty miles of Belerma Square."

But notwithstanding his long absence and his good feeling towards his new acquaintance, Malcolm and Mina both noticed that the cloud which had rested on their uncle's brow ere his departure for Holland, had returned thence with him, and a gloom seemed to hang over the entire household from the moment of his re-appearance, the mystery of which no member of the establishment, and no person, perhaps, in the circle of his acquaintances, save Mr. Alfred Westwood, was able to fathom.

That clever individual, however, having opened "by mistake" a letter for Mr. Merapie, which he

knew was not on business, during his principal's absence in Holland, had arrived, after its perusal, at the knowledge of a great secret; which knowledge put him in a position to triumph a little over Malcolm and Mina Frazer, and to feel that, to a certain extent, the whole family, from Mr. Merapie down to his refractory niece, was, after a fashion, in his "power."

"I have often wished," he said, after taking a copy of the epistle above referred to, "I have often wished to possess some 'hold' over them all, and that girl in particular; I have got one now, a capital lever, if only properly employed, and, please the fates, I 'll use it."

And having arrived at this Christian determination, Mr. Westwood sallied forth and hunted over half the city shops to get an oblong seal with the announcement "I wait" cut thereon; and when, after great difficulty, he had succeeded in obtaining it, and a stick of pale blue wax, he returned to the office and closed up the missive again, which, by the way, was directed in a female hand, and marked "private." And, as he chanced to be writing that very afternoon to Mr. Merapie, he forwarded the letter to him and sauntered thenceforth about his partner's house in Belerma Square as if, to repeat

Malcolm's impatient expression, "it belonged to him."

And though, during the course of the following month, he was too much occupied through the week with business, and too constantly engaged on Sundays watching Mina and Mr. Ivraine, to pursue his investigations as far as he desired, yet he never for one moment forgot what he had discovered, and what he wished further to discover; so, when in due course Mr. Merapie's return and Ernest's departure set him once again, as it were, at liberty, he hastened to make himself master of the whole subject by actual observation and personal investigation on the spot.

It was some five miles from London, under the spreading branches of an ancient walnut tree, standing leafless and bare, close to the entrance of one of those villas we see so perpetually advertised under the appellation of "genteel residences," that knowledge, full and complete, reached the mind of Alfred Westwood; more full and complete truly than he had ever desired should dawn upon his startled comprehension: for, as he sauntered past the place in the chill cold light of a February afternoon, a phaeton, containing two persons, a lady and a boy, drove up to the gate; there was a momentary pause, whilst a

person, who chanced to be coming out at the instant, opened it, and the glance which that pause enabled Mr. Westwood to catch of the lady's face caused him to turn as pale as a corpse and tremble for a second like a woman.

He had barely time to pull his hat almost involuntarily over his eyes ere the vehicle and its occupants were gone. They had come, passed him, and departed like a dream of the morning; but Alfred Westwood knew it was no dream. "I wish to heavens it were," he muttered, with clenched teeth and livid lips, as he strode after the female who had admitted the pair, and whom he recollected perfectly, as he recollected every thing and place and person on whom, with his extremely far-seeing, disagreeably searching eyes, he had once looked.

"Mrs. Colefort," he said, and the words, though spoken in a low tone, made her to whom they were addressed start as if a pistol had gone off at her ear. "Do you not remember me?" he added, finding she only stared in his face by way of reply to his abrupt salutation.

"Yes, sir," she stammered, "but——"

"But you do not wish to remember," he interrupted, his wonted self-possession having by this time completely returned to him: "well so be it;

only one question fairly answered, and I am satisfied; who is that?"

"Who is what?" demanded the old woman, a gleam of her ancient cunning sharpening her wrinkled features.

"Pshaw!" returned Mr. Westwood; "who is the lady you admitted this instant into that villa place?"

"My mistress," was the brief reply.

"And her *real* name," he persisted; "recollect I am willing to pay for accurate information."

"What will you give to know?" asked the woman.

"Five pounds," replied the man who once had been a bankrupt.

"Five pence," she contemptuously retorted; "it's worth fifty guineas."

"Five pounds or nothing," said Westwood determinedly.

"Make it ten, and I 'll tell you," she returned.

"If you won't speak for five, you may hold your tongue," was the response; "so take your choice, for I ask you for the last time, who is she?"

A purse glittering with steel beads was in Mr. Westwood's hand as he uttered the foregoing sentence; and when, at its conclusion, he held forth

five sovereigns and added the single word "Now," the woman felt herself impotent to withstand the bribe, small though she considered it, and therefore cautiously answered, after stealing a look behind her,

"Mrs. Merapie."

"The devil!" ejaculated Mr. Westwood, and he ground out a few oaths between his teeth, whilst Mrs. Colefort, with a sinister laugh, echoed,

"Yes, she is pretty nearly one; so John Merapie found, to his sorrow, before she had borne his name long."

"And what name did she bear before that?" demanded Mr. Westwood fiercely.

"Her own, I suppose,—Margaret Maxwell."

If the light had been a little clearer and her own eyes undimmed by the mist of age, the woman might have noticed that a sort of throe seemed to convulse Mr. Westwood's frame as her answer grated on his ear. He winced under the sound of that name as if it had touched some concealed wound: the truth which the quondam housekeeper framed into such unconsciously telling words, appeared to blast him, as if a wind from some barren desert had passed over and scorched his soul.

Long after he had left the woman, long after he

had returned to London, days after the brief interview in which he had learnt all he wished to know and a great deal more besides; in the busy 'Change, in his quiet house, everywhere, Alfred Westwood found himself inwardly repeating, over and over again, one single sentence—

"Margaret Maxwell—Mrs. Merapie."

And this sentence never grew old or familiar to his ear; he harped on it eternally, and yet still its meaning always came with a sort of shock upon his understanding.

"Margaret Maxwell—Mrs. Merapie."

If a spell had been contained in this simple combination of letters, it could scarcely have produced a greater effect on the *ci-devant* clerk, who became for a time quite taciturn and reserved, who ceased to domineer over Malcolm or torment Mina, and never once strove to dissuade Mr. Merapie from permitting both the young people to go to the Highlands and enjoy themselves.

"What under the sun has come over Westwood?" demanded Malcolm of his sister, the evening before they started on their self-imposed pilgrimage northwards.

"He is growing old, dear," answered Mina, who could afford to laugh at her uncle's partner now she

was in a good temper and going to leave him behind her; but neither her brother nor Miss Caldera, who was present, thought her suggestion a rational one, and the former, for once, felt almost inclined to agree with the governess, when she told Mina a little tartly, that she was a very absurd girl, and that she surely might have had sense enough to see that something must be decidedly going wrong at the office, when both her uncle and his partner were so grave.

"Heaven send they may weather the storm," added Malcolm devoutly; "but, if there be any judging from faces, business clouds must be of the blackest down at Wapping; however, Uncle John is a first-rate craft, and the wind cannot always blow a-head; so, when I return from Craigmaver, I shall hope to find him in a friendly port, and consequently able and inclined to do what I want him to do—buy me a commission."

"You ought to be made to work for one," remarked Miss Caldera.

"All in good time, dear lady," answered Malcolm, laughing; "I make no doubt I shall have to be very industrious, a human sort of busy bee at some future period or other."

"It will be greatly against your inclination,

then," retorted the governess: but, spite of the utterance of this truism, Malcolm and she parted remarkably good friends; and Mina, with a little tremor in her voice, promised, as she kissed the dear, quaint, steady friend, not to forget her, and to bring her back a cairngorm brooch from Scotland.

"Bring yourself, you wayward creature," answered Miss Caldera, "and don't leave your heart behind you."

"Oh, no! I shall keep it safe for—Mr. Westwood," were the girl's last words ere, in a perfect ecstasy of delight, she bent her longing eager eyes northwards; for, steadily as the needle points to the pole, Mina's thoughts and hopes and expectations turned ever unceasingly towards the land of her birth: to revisit it, to hear again well-remembered voices, to speak once more to those she loved, to wander as of yore over the hills, to see the grand old mountains piled against the clear blue heavens, had been the dream of her life, the wish of her soul for years: and now it was no longer to be a dream, an ungratified wish,—it would soon be a reality.

"I am so glad," she said to Malcolm, "that I could cry." And Mina did cry with joy to see the old familiar places once again, just as she had, in

former times, wept in bitter anguish because compelled to leave them all behind her.

It was a lovely evening in the early spring when, after that long dreary separation and fatiguing journey, Mina caught at length a distant view of beautiful Craigmaver. The departing sun flung a warm rich tint over mountain and valley, over the peaceful lake, the silent firs, and the graceful birch trees that were just donning their first faint green attire. A feeling, such as she had not experienced for years, of youth and freshness and vigour and hope, swept across Mina's heart as she leant forward and took in, at one earnest glance, every object in the landscape; but since the days when, a child by her father's side, she had enjoyed that scene without a care or a thought of sorrow, a few corroding drops from the cup of experience had fallen on her spirit and saddened it; and thus, even in the midst of her joy, a memory of pain brought tears to her eyes and blinded them.

"Nothing is changed," remarked Malcolm, as they drove along, "excepting that the trees have grown."

Mina made no answer. Nothing except the trees, indeed, had changed, she knew, since last she had looked upon that place; but, since the old times,

when they had been wont to visit the laird, her father had passed from earth for ever, and Glenfiord was not theirs now; and the girl called another country, home; and the inheritance that was to have been Malcolm's had been purchased by strangers; and in the house and gardens and pleasure grounds, which her dead parent had owned and improved and prided himself on, she or hers had no right to set foot, unless by courtesy or sufferance. As a dark thread mingles ever in the web of human life, no matter of what gay, bright colours the rest of that web may be woven, so the sad thought of her lost home and of him who had dwelt there caused one or two tears of sorrow to fall with the many happy ones that came streaming from the girl's dark eyes, as she and Malcolm drew nearer, still nearer, to the lonely lovely nook amid Highland mountains, where the head of the Frazer clan, the best, the truest, the worthiest descendant of a proud old race, dwelt peacefully.

"Look up, Mina," cried her brother, "there they are on the lawn watching for us." And, as he spoke, the old laird advanced to meet the vehicle.

There was a wild throbbing at her heart: as she sprang out, a mist fell upon every object within her range of vision; but still Mina, hanging on her

uncle's neck, heard his almost inarticulate words of tender welcome sounding in her ear, and, for one brief moment, she felt, as she had once said to Miss Caldera she should feel, "that she had not a thought of care, a wish on earth ungratified."

"Are you just the same as ever?" demanded the laird, holding her a little from him and gazing intently into her agitated face, wet with weeping, yet still bright with smiles, "are you just the same as ever?"

"Not a bit better, uncle," she answered.

"If you are no worse, I humbly thank God," said the old man, looking upwards; "but are you sure," he added, as though in doubt, "are you quite sure you have brought the old honest heart you once possessed back to us again?"

"It has never been away from you," she earnestly replied; "my body was in England, but my spirit always remained here; and you, uncle, you are not in the least altered, but Allan has become a man: dear me! how he has changed." And Mina stood for a moment contemplating him whom she had left a boy, and whom she returned to find as handsome and stately a specimen of the Highland gentleman as ever crossed the moors, or brought down, with unerring aim, the wild bird, which finds a perfumed

home and a violent death amid the glowing purple heather.

"Yes, cousin mine," responded Allan, "I am changed in many ways, and I have, alas! for me, become a man; but do not delude yourself into the belief that I am the only one time has touched, for I see you are "Little Mina" no longer, and the child of the mountains has become quite a young English lady; and Malcolm, I find, has managed to overtop me: we are all changed in appearance, two for the better, one for the worse, if you like to accept the vague compliment, cousin; I hope you will."

"Is flattery an accomplishment you have learnt since we parted, Allan?" demanded Mina, suddenly, and the sharp question brought a glow on his cheek, even while he answered "No."

"It is," broke in the old laird; "he is more altered than you are, notwithstanding he has lived at Craigmaver, and you amongst the noisy London streets."

"Send me to London in charge of my fair cousin then, sir, and see whether the din may not improve me," was Allan's response: but Mr. Frazer merely shook his head in reply, and led Mina off to the house, sighing as he did so.

Inside the mansion all remained just as his niece

had left it: the deer's heads and the old swords and gauntlets and pieces of ancient armour hung in the hall in the same places she remembered they occupied when she was a very little girl; the furniture in the drawing-room, the tapestry in the bed-chambers, the polished oaken floors, the carved arm-chairs, the family portraits, the view from the windows, all were so like what they had been that, as she wandered through the apartments, Mina felt as if everything, save herself, must have stood still during the years that had seemed in London so countless, but which then she imagined she could clasp at once in her hand—so dream-like did that portion of the past appear, so real and tangible was the present. The shore of childhood came, for the instant, so close to that bordering upon womanhood, that, for the moment, Mina fancied they actually touched, and forgot the broad wide gulf stretching between the two, over which she had, in the dreary interim, crossed. As the mariner, after months and months of weary voyaging, recollects not, when he again beholds the cliffs of his native land, the pains and perils of the sea, so the period she had spent in England became a sort of blank, for the time being, in Mina's memory; she rejoiced so fervently to come back once more to find all as she had left it.

All! the girl soon discovered there was a something different in the old place; what, she could not tell: it was not that they, the inhabitants of that Highland home, were altered in affection towards her; it was not that her love for them had suffered any diminution; it was not that less concord reigned in the domestic circle; that disunion prevailed; that arguments arose. Mina could not find out what the "something" might be; and, as it seemed to be independent of her and hers, to be merely a shadow from some distant cloud, which threw a sort of darkness into that once perfectly sunshiny house, she gave up, after the first day or two, speculating concerning it; thus the weeks sped joyously on, and a flush of greater health than had for years past been seen there, mantled on her formerly pallid cheek; while Malcolm and she built air castles innumerable; and time passed, oh! with what swift noiseless feet; life seeming a sort of fairy dream to Mina during those quiet hours when she walked and sat with her uncle, and strolled about the gardens, talking to Saunders and looking at his flowers; when she and her brother and cousin rode quietly over the moors; and when Allan, in the solemn twilight, touched the keys of an old pianoforte, and sung songs so plaintive and beautiful that the girl used to bow her

head on her hands and weep, she knew not why, to hear them.

For Allan Frazer had learned many an accomplishment besides flattery since the days when they last parted: he was skilled, not merely in field sports, but also in those other acquirements that make a man be deemed a welcome guest in the houses of the literary, the fashionable, the select. He could sketch with a firm, rapid, masterly hand the scenery of his native land; he could sing, in tones that stole somehow into the very innermost recesses of the heart, Scotch and Italian and Spanish airs; he was learned in many sciences, wrote works that publishers accepted, and poems ladies loved him for inditing; he had read and studied and thought; and when he went to Edinburgh, clever men sought him; and the most beautiful women of that metropolis would rather have danced with Allan Frazer than with many a lord or baronet, for he was the "fashion" there—Mina's handsome, elegant, interesting cousin.

"How much you know, Allan," she remarked to him one day, shortly after her arrival.

"I have paid a price for it," he answered, with a strange smile.

Mina paused and looked doubtingly at him for a moment; then she said,

"If I were not afraid of my words sounding tame, after the compliments uncle tells me you are accustomed to, I would say I never saw any one so improved in my life."

"I have gained a good deal I could have done without, Mina," he replied a little gravely, "and lost what I can ill spare."

"Tell me what it is, Allan," she pleaded, "perhaps it may keep me from envying you too much; tell me what it is."

"Peace of mind," he answered, with a sigh; and Mina, after gazing into his clouded face, feared that it really was so, though why it should be she found herself perfectly incompetent to tell.

CHAPTER XVI.

COUSIN ALLAN.

TIME, which hath a way of enlarging our circle of new acquaintances, and of curtailing, by various painful methods, the number of those whom the soul in its tenderness loves to call "old friends," brought, ere she had been quite a month at Craigmaver, a fresh individual under the notice of Mina Frazer; one whom, in after life, amid all the cares and troubles and difficulties of existence, she never forgot.

She—for this new friend, started up in the person of a most lovely and accomplished woman—appeared somewhat after the sudden wayward fashion of an apparition before the eyes of the old laird's niece, whom Allan had undertaken, as Mina told him, "for want of something better to do," to instruct in the manifold mysteries of sketching and shading, of perspectives and foregrounds.

"There never was a quicker pupil," so said the master.

"Nor a more patient master," so said the pupil: and thus, as both, perhaps, were pretty nearly correct, the work of tuition progressed pleasantly and rapidly; for Mina had an object in view, and worked diligently to accomplish it; and Allan, tired and sick of fine ladies as he was, found himself wonderfully interested in the progress of one who could be earnest about what he considered such an insignificant trifle as the carrying back a few of her "own home views" to the country which circumstances had compelled her to adopt, whether she would or not.

One morning, therefore, in that most unsatisfactory, half smiling, half weeping month called April, Mina was busily engaged copying in pencil a landscape Allan had laid before her, whilst he stood near, looking, if the truth must be told, far oftener at his cousin than the drawing,—and Malcolm, whom the household generally called indolent, lay stretched at full length on a sofa, dreaming about his scarlet uniform, and the great deeds he would perform at some indefinite future period,—when a sound of horses' hoofs trampling over the gravel caused Mina to look up from her employment, and as she

did so, the words, "How beautiful!" burst from her lips; and springing from her seat, she darted to the window to obtain a nearer view of the object which had attracted her attention.

"Oh! how beautiful!" she again exclaimed. "Allan, do come here and tell me who it is." But Allan, without pausing to reply, flung the portfolio, landscape, half-finished drawing, pencils, and et-ceteras recklessly into a corner, and darted out of the room, and down to the principal entrance, where Mina soon beheld him assisting the new arrival to dismount; and a few minutes afterwards she came gliding into the drawing-room, accompanied by a fine military-looking man, and stood before Mina a vision of feminine loveliness, such as she had never previously conceived existed, save in the imagination of some great master of the divine art of painting.

Yes! beautiful she was; beautiful as a dream, as the conception of a poet, as the ideal of a visionary! If Mina had been born in another land and educated in a different faith, she might almost have knelt at the sight of this unexpected visitor, fancying she was a spirit from some purer, happier, brighter world than ours,—save for the costume, that assuredly savoured more of earth than heaven,

and which proved at once she was after all only a mortal, though certainly a very superior one; but which, notwithstanding its sublunary character, set off every personal gift she was possessed of to the very greatest advantage, and that she knew perfectly well, wherefore she always wore it, whenever she had even half an apology for doing so.

It was a riding-habit of the finest blue cloth, which, fitting closely to her figure, displayed the shape of her shoulders, the slenderness of her waist, and the gracefulness of her every movement. A small Highland bonnet made of black velvet, from which depended a drooping feather, secured by a silver thistle, contrasted well with the luxuriant golden curls the lady permitted to fall loose and unregarded in rich masses over her neck. Her eyes were large and of that most beautiful purple sometimes to be noted in connection with light hair; her features were small, regular, and perfect, as if they had been chiselled by the hand of some great sculptor, but a brilliant colour gave life and animation to the whole; whilst dark eyebrows and still darker lashes redeemed the countenance from that charge of mawkish sameness, which is frequently laid—whether justly or unjustly signifies little at present—to the account of those of beauty's daughters whom

we call — to distinguish them from their darker sisters—blondes.

But Cecilia Warmond had a far higher charm than any mere loveliness of feature can confer; she had that which can make a gentlewoman out of the coarsest and most unpromising materials, redeem the plainest face, render elegant the meanest home, —the all-pervading, indescribable, incomprehensible, all-powerful, instantly discernible charm of grace. There was a something about the way she walked across a room, extended her hand, accepted a kindness,—in the tone of her voice, in the sound of her laugh, which would have proved irresistible had she been plain as she was handsome, old as she was young.

The mere advent of one who had been, during the whole of the preceding Edinburgh season, the centre of universal attraction, the theme of general conversation, the courted, the admired, the flattered, was quite sufficient to account for the way in which the guilty colour came and went in Allan Frazer's cheek, for the sudden embarrassment perceptible in his usual half-careless, half-satirical, whole-fashionable manner. Mina settled the business ere the ceremony of introduction had taken place, in a peculiarly feminine mental sentence.

"He is in love with her;" and the time had been

when that view of the question would have proved especially happy and felicitous.

"My cousins, Mr. and Miss Frazer," said Allan as the drawing-room door closed upon the new comers. "Mina, Miss Warmond, General Warmond."

"What a stiff formal introduction, O lord of the mountains," broke in the lady, whose rapid eye had scanned "the cousins" at a glance. "Miss Frazer," she continued, "I have heard about you ever since I came to Scotland, and I have wished so much to know you, that when I heard you were actually at Craigmaver, I could not resist the temptation, but, setting that bugbear, called by those dreary individuals styled fashionable people, strict etiquette, at defiance, I persuaded papa to gallop over with me from Locholen, and, accordingly, here we have come to 'make friends' with you." And she stretched forth the smallest hand in the world, encased in the most expensive and *recherché* of riding gloves, as she spoke, for Mina's acceptance.

The girl knew now perfectly who she was, for if, since her arrival at Craigmaver, the laird's grandson had never once mentioned the name of Warmond, she had heard it years previously, when Glenfiord passed away into the hands of strangers, when she was told that a General Warmond, who had wedded

Miss Gordon of Locholen, was the purchaser of the place which once had been her father's, near to which, under the shadow of Ben Lomond, within sound of the ripple of the lake, he slept his dreamless sleep—unmindful of scenery, forgetful of sorrow —peacefully.

Yes, she knew her now. This, then, was the lady who resided in the home that, but for a dreadful misfortune, had still been theirs. A choking sensation oppressed Mina as those slender fingers clasped hers in proffered friendship, a sort of darkness came before her eyes; for an instant a gloom fell over the sunshine, and that faint sickness of the heart which a great surprise, whether joyful or sorrowful, frequently induces, caused her to see even the fair vision who spoke so sweetly and kindly to her, dimly, as if she were beholding unreal objects in some vague, half-mournful, half-pleasant dream.

It was but for a moment, however, this lasted, for then the full use of her faculties returned, and Mina could both hear and see.

"And this is your other cousin," said Miss Warmond, turning her fine eyes on Malcolm's handsome face, and speaking actually to him, though her words seemed addressed to Allan; "this is your other cousin," and, with a slightly diffident air, she once

again extended the white-gloved hand to a member of the Frazer family; and the act, and the bright frank smile which accompanied it, fairly "settled" the susceptible youth, and caused him to forget all about "grey eyes" and a host of other coloured orbs he had admired since them, and write in a private mental note book, wherein he was always setting down and rubbing out facts relative to his varying ideas of feminine beauty: Mem.—Purple eyes are the most lovely and expressive in the world.

Poor Malcolm! he never saw a pretty face that he did not fall over head and ears in love with the owner instanter: it was surely fortunate, considering the alarming frequency of these attacks, that they did not last long, for, if they had, the fit must inevitably have proved mortal.

That was a happy day to Mina, for the visitors remained for lunch, and she and her new friend strolled away together through the gardens; and then Miss Warmond talked in her soft, low, musical voice, so touchingly about Glenfiord, that the tears she vainly tried to repress came at last raining down Mina's cheeks, and then Cecilia, who was her senior by some years, kissed the weeping girl and told her how she had often mourned to think of the child Allan said had almost broken her heart

when removed from amid the flowers and perfume and luxuriance of that wild romantic home.

"Your name has always possessed a strange interest for me," added Miss Warmond;" therefore, now we have at last met, I hope we shall be real friends."

"If you will let me be fond of you," said Mina impetuously, "I will love you always; I never saw anybody so beautiful as you are in all my life before; I never saw any one I thought I could like one half so well:" and thus, on the spot, a friendship was formed, destined to last as long as such absurd friendships ever do last, but not an instant longer.

There was something perfectly charming, the young girl thought, in Miss Warmond's manner towards her uncle; it was so respectful, so deferential, yet, withal, so playful and captivating, that Mina did not marvel to notice how completely the laird was fascinated by it.

"There was nobody in the world like Cecilia," so the General evidently thought, so Mr. Frazer felt convinced; and Mina and Malcolm endorsed this opinion without further inquiry or the slightest hesitation.

For, if the sister had seen a few disagreeable and repelling women in the course of her short passage

across life's ocean, she had never met with a false one; so she accepted the friendship (which, if she had been a little older or a little wiser, she would have known could not be worth much, else it had never been so freely offered) with a frank, trusting heart; knowing no deceit herself, the idea of it in another never crossed her mind: besides, who, looking at Cecilia, could dream of deceit? The surface mirror was apparently too clear and transparent to induce a belief that the slightest dross *might* perhaps be found lying at the bottom of a heart which, seemingly guileless as a child's, was really so perfectly choked up with dangerous thoughts and black deceit and jealous feelings, that truth had long since fled from the citadel in disgust and taken up her abode in better, though possibly less inviting looking, quarters.

Cecilia kindly took upon herself the task of teaching Mina the exact meaning of the word "hypocrisy;" but, as it was long ere the girl discovered her benevolent intention, she took her as she seemed, and liked her accordingly. And Malcolm. Why, if any one had informed him Miss Warmond was not quite so good as she seemed, he would have answered, like a great, good-natured, foolish, overgrown boy, who thought himself a man, as he was,

"Well, you see, I don't mind that; if a woman be but pretty, I can forgive her anything."

So every one was satisfied that bright April day, save, perhaps, Allan Frazer, and matters went smoothly, as they generally do, on the occasion of tolerably short visits, when people are inclined to be mutually pleased, and when one or two agreeable talkers and a proportionate number of patient listeners are present: but at length General Warmond declared they must positively go, and so Cecilia, after saying all sorts of pretty things, tripped gracefully across the hall and down the steps, and was obliging enough to permit Malcolm to help her to the saddle and adjust the reins properly for her; after which she bade farewell to all the Craigmaver gentlemen, and rode off down the avenue, not forgetting, however, as she did so, to turn round and kiss her hand to Mina, who stood watching her departure from one of the drawing-room windows.

The girl caught herself sighing when the Highland bonnet disappeared altogether from sight; if she could but have known what sorrow the lady who wore it was destined to cause her, she might have gone down on her knees and prayed she should never more behold it: but Mina possessed not the

vision of a seer, and so, quite excited with the events of the day, and delighted to think of the beautiful being, who, though so perfectly fascinating, deigned to call her "friend," she took possession of her uncle's arm, and walked in with him to dinner.

"I was not aware, Allan," said old Mr. Frazer, after a long ominous pause, which, contrary to custom, succeeded the withdrawal of the cloth, "I was not aware, Allan, you had been over at Locholen, yesterday."

"I happened to be in the neighbourhood, sir," answered his grandson, "and called to inquire how Mr. Gordon was."

"And found General and Miss Warmond there," added Mr. Frazer.

"Yes, they arrived the day previously, I believe," responded Allan, who was, to all intents and purposes, apparently so much engrossed in the difficult operation of peeling an apple, that he could not raise his eyes and look straight at his grandfather as he spoke.

Mr. Frazer impatiently cracked one or two nuts, and then said hurriedly,

"Would it not have been better, more *comme il faut* altogether, for Mina to have called on Miss Warmond? If I had known she was at Locholen"——

"I told Miss Warmond," interposed Allan, "that as Mina was not very strong, and the distance between us was so great, I feared my cousin would be unable to call until the weather was a little more settled; so she very kindly said she would not stand on ceremony, but ride ten long miles here, and ten equally long back again, to see her, as she has done."

There was a tone in Allan's voice, and a look in his eyes as he uttered the foregoing sentence, which Mina could not understand; it was not precisely a sneer that disfigured his face, nor was it an expression of pain; but it was a something so certainly very far from agreeable, that the girl caught herself thinking.

"I must have been mistaken; he cannot be in love with her:" and yet, as she was unable to reconcile his manner towards Miss Warmond with this new version of an old subject, she determined to leave time to solve an enigma she was getting tired of puzzling over, to wit, the heart of her cousin Allan. But that very evening he so provoked her with silently listening to all her enthusiastic observations respecting Miss Warmond, and replying "never a word" to them, that she fairly forgot about "time" altogether; and wishing to get to the bottom of the matter at once, indignantly demanded,

"Allan, can you admire nothing?"

The young man looked earnestly away to the distant hills, scarcely visible through the gathering twilight, and a sort of shadow, as if from them, fell over his face as he did so; after a moment's pause he answered,

"The stern old mountains, and the bright, healthy, happy child; the pure face of nature, and the honest face of man: everything on which our God has set the stamp of grandeur, or of loveliness, or of goodness, I admire."

There was a solemnity in this reply, very different from the usual careless indifference of his remarks; but still Mina remained unsatisfied.

"Then do you not think Miss Warmond very beautiful?"

"I consider her the handsomest, the most accomplished, the most fascinating heiress in Scotland," he responded; "what induced you to imagine, cousin Mina, I was blind to her perfections?"

"The way you have got of praising either not at all, or else against your will," replied his cousin: "I never fancied it possible for any mere mortal to be so surpassingly lovely; I never even dreamt of such a face before, and, at first, I fancied you thought her a sort of angel too; but now, Allan, I

cannot make you out exactly. I do not understand you at all; I wish I could."

"You need not, Mina," he replied, smiling grimly; "the knowledge of myself I have lately acquired has brought little happiness to me; it could not give any to you. Suppose we let the matter rest there."

"I have always felt just the same towards you as to Malcolm," Mina returned, not heeding the latter portion of the foregoing sentence; "and I am sure, though you are so clever and so much changed in many ways, you consider me quite as much your sister as 'in the old days departed;' and therefore I should like greatly to ask you one question—you won't be angry with me, will you? may I ask it?"

"Go on," said Allan, gazing forth more fixedly than ever into the gloom.

"Are you really unhappy, or is it only a habit you have acquired of talking as if you were? is there really any sorrow—any pressing sorrow I mean—in your heart?"

"There is," he briefly answered.

"And the cause, dear Allan, may I not know it?"

He paused for a moment, as if irresolute; then repressing the strong inclination he felt to tell her all, he said,

"No, Mina, my own 'little' sister Mina, as I used to call you, you must not ask me anything more about myself ever; you will be fond of me, spite of my faults, and we will be great friends always, shall we not?"

He held out his hand as he spoke, as if to seal, with a good honest pressure, the cousinly compact; then, gliding away to the piano, he sung—more sweetly and mournfully than Mina had ever before heard him sing—old laments and hymns and dirges that made the girl's heart sorrowful within her and caused Malcolm, who, having been out with the laird, returned at this juncture, to declare Allan had mistaken his vocation, for he was only fit for one of three callings, to wit, a parson, a parish clerk, or an undertaker.

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